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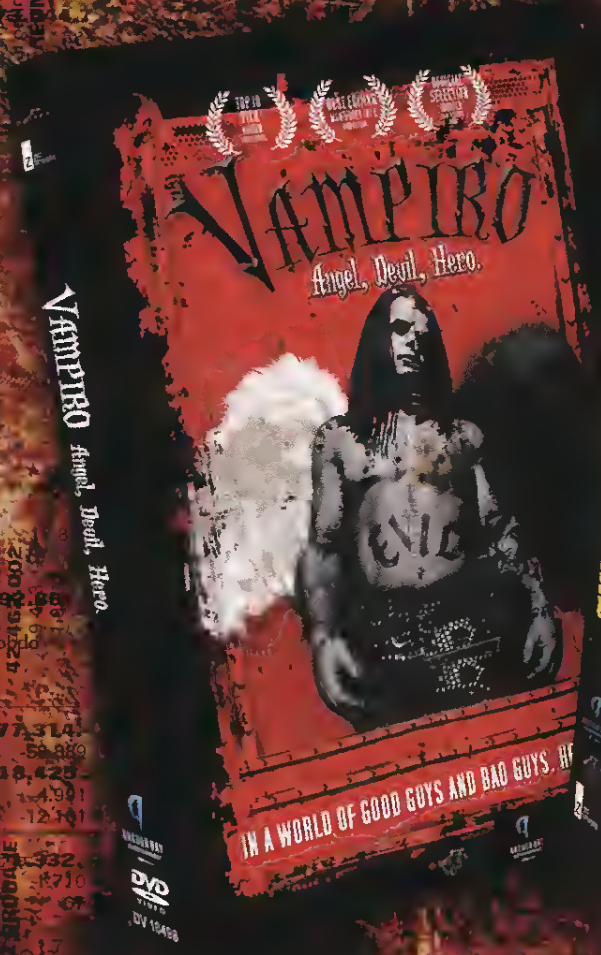
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MAY 2009 ISSUE #89



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More than fifteen years and three blockbuster *Spider-Man* movies since the last *Evil Dead* film, Sam Raimi returns to his low-budget horror roots with *Drag Me to Hell*. Featuring interviews with the director, co-screenwriter Ivan Raimi and makeup FX guru Greg Nicotero.
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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

Like any genre fan worth her total blood volume, I first became aware of Sam Raimi after I saw *The Evil Dead*. But unlike those lucky bastards who got to see it at the drive-in, I watched it on video (a newer market at the time) with a bunch of rowdy drunk friends in a pal's basement. It was through a giddy, intoxicated haze that I first witnessed bumbling accidental hero Ashley J. Williams hack up his demonic girlfriend for the very first time.

Many different colours of bodily fluids, an ominous porch swing, several conjured demons, possessed friends, dismembered limbs, a tree rape and one hideous, soul-swallowing, cellar-dwelling bitch later, we found ourselves wiping back tears as we laughed and screamed at the sloppy, slippy, ooey gooey, violating bliss that is *The Evil Dead*.

Billed in its tagline as "The Ultimate Experience in Grueling Terror," Raimi's hilarious haunted cabin-in-the-woods flick – made when he was just 23 – was pretty shocking and genuinely scary at times, thanks to DOP Tim Philo's inventive shaky camera work. Not to mention the employment of classic stop-motion techniques that captured full body dissolutions to a puddles of bile, and animated that rapist tree's "hands" and memorable heat-seeking "wood."

Looking back on 1982's *The Evil Dead* (itself based on a Raimi short called *Within the Woods*), it's almost the ultimate gonzo-horror comedy, shot independently for around the cost of Raimi's infamous 1973 Oldsmobile Delta 88. Okay, truthfully it was made for around $300,000 all-in, but it is brimming with much enthusiasm for the genre, right down to the unmistakable nod to Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes*. But it was chiefly Raimi's remarkable ability to incite both laughter and revulsion during the same gore gag that gained the film so much audience approval.

Suffice to say, *Evil Dead* has a way of sticking to the ribs. Over the years the movie and its much funnier sequel (which was in essence a remake), have garnered such a massive cult following that today even the average film fan knows who Ash is. The posers will cite him as "that funny guy with the chainsaw from *Army of Darkness*," but any affirmed member of the unholy horror movie coven knows it's only the third film in the series that began with *The Evil Dead*.

A consummate storyteller, actor, producer and one-time amateur magician, Raimi is not the type to allow himself to be pigeonholed. He went on to tell all kinds of tales: sci-fi/action/horror (*Darkman*), a sports biopic (*For Love of the Game*), a Harryhausen-inspired fantasy adventure (*Army of Darkness*, a.k.a *Bruce Campbell vs. Army of Darkness*), a western (*The Quick and the Dead*), a crime drama (*A Simple Plan*), a supernatural mystery thriller (*The Gift*) and, of course, a series of box office record-breaking comic book superhero movies (*Spider-Man*).

Still, us *Evil Dead* obsessives longed for Raimi to return to the genre that birthed him as a filmmaker. Let's face it, his production company, Ghost House, though dedicated to lower budget genre movies, just wasn't enough. (In fact, it has produced some pretty crappy horror flicks.) Now, after a couple of decades, Raimi returns with a bona fide original indie horror film, a story he wrote with his brother Ivan years ago that he says he just couldn't get out of his head. And when it was passed on to another writer to become a "real movie," the brothers agreed that those versions were "not stupid enough," and decided to make it their own way.

The result is a black(-ish) comedy in the vein of *Army of Darkness*, called *Drag Me To Hell*, about an old gypsy woman who places a nasty curse on the loan officer who denies her appeals for an extension on her mortgage. It's a simple story, really, but regardless – or perhaps in spite of – his current employment status, Raimi's feeling a lot of pressure. Fans have put the *Evil Dead* movies on a pedestal so high, even the director agrees it's near impossible to top. I too was extremely skeptical after I saw the *DMTH* trailer, which I don't think represents the film adequately, but the filmmaker's eagerness to please and endearing nervousness about returning to horror is illuminating (he almost puked at the test screening from worry it wouldn't please his fans).

If that's not enough to incite your inner deadite, consider this. Sam Raimi – the guy who made the *Evil Dead* movies – is back, and he wants to drag us all to hell. What more can I say besides .. join him!

Jovanka

jovanka@rue-morgue.com

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

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RUE MORGUE #89 is dedicated to Godzilla the Black Pug, the memory of Lou Perryman and Marilyn Chambers.

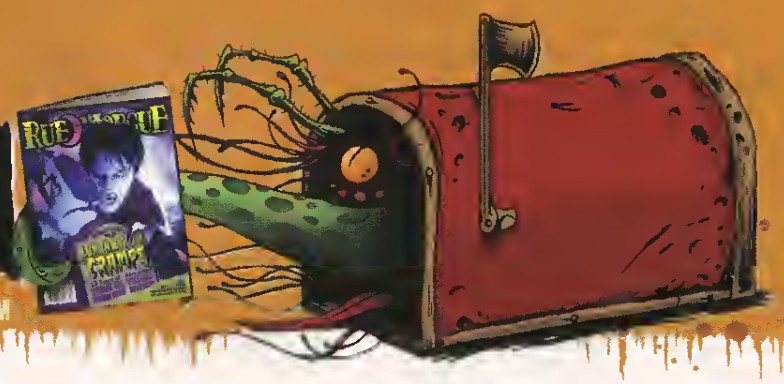
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POST MORTEM

COMMENTS • QUESTIONS • CRITICISM



I COULD NOT AGREE MORE with what was said in last month's Note From Underground. You have expressed exactly the point I have been making to my friends for the last few years. I believe your editorial should be sent to every movie company in America with the heading, "This is why you're killing horror!" I could not have been any more disappointed with the latest *Friday* redo, as I am not a thirteen-year-old with Attention Deficit Disorder (and thus not the target audience). The characters and dialogue were horrible for a *Friday* entry, and that's saying something, plus the so-called "gritty" look and direction were infuriating. The fact that you called out the only financially successful horror film of the past few months for being utter crap is why I read your magazine and will continue to do so. You speak for the true fans, and for that I again say thanks.

Beau Rich – Bean Station, Tennessee

THANK YOU for the fantastic Lux Interior tribute. My favourite magazine honouring my favorite voodoo/swampabilly/jungle/rock-n-roller. The Cramps have been part of my psyche since the early '80s. Between them and my lifelong obsession with monsters and horror, it's been a great existence. Never rest in peace Lux. This boring world won't be the same without you.

Gary J. Hoffart – Tacoma, Washington

I OPENED *RM#88* and read through the "Sick Top Six" Killer Clowns. I thought for sure I would see *Clownhouse* listed here but I didn't. This is by far the best clown horror movie I have ever seen and it sits very high in my list of favourite horror movies period. Anyway, keep up the good work you sick bunch of freaks.

Jason Carnes – address withheld

WHY IS IT that in virtually every issue there is a letter by some naive Christian whining about (perceived) hostility and "under-representation" within this publication and in the genre at large? Seriously, the nerve of these people to come here whining about torture porn, gay horror, or whatever. Oh, but Christians get all wet and sticky for a simulated snuff-porn like *The Passion of the Christ*. Please! And the nerve of them to complain that they don't receive due acknowledgement in horror – even though they engage in boycotts, blacklists, bans, book-burnings, exclusions and disenfranchisement of all things non-Christian. If this shit is Christianity's "grand" contribution to horror, they can have it back. No thanks!

Damos Abadon – Portland, Orgeon

THANK YOU for the respectful article on Christian horror. As a believer, I take a lot of crap for being a Christian and a horrorhound, from both sides. I don't know why I have always had a fear fetish, but I have never felt more at home than in the last issue. Usually, us Christians are the "enemy," but I assure you that there are more of us that love your rag than you think.

John McMullen – address withheld

I'VE NEVER LIKED the Christian fill-in-the-blank label for anything. Besides violating Matthew 6, the whole idea of selling "Christian" books and movies to "Christian" audiences strikes me as evil as movie tie-ins to Happy Meals, you know what I mean? I prefer instead what Johnny Cash said about himself: "I'm not a Christian artist, I'm an artist who happens to be Christian." If you wonder what that means, look at who else fits that bill (U2, Alice Cooper and John Woo, to name a few).

Mark Steensland – Erie, Pennsylvania

READING YOUR Note from Underground in *RM#87* touched a chord. What you said about the fear of death and what lies beyond struck me. I was raised Independent Baptist (Independent because Southern Baptists were considered too liberal), and I was pretty fervent in my beliefs; the greatest fear I have ever known was hell. As I've grown older and more liberal, I now have many doubts as to even the existence of hell. Still, throughout my life, nothing, nothing, has ever even come close to the fear that I felt as a child and young person about the idea of that place. When I moved out of my parents' house in my twenties, my love of horror culture grew and grew, partially because I liked the immediate presentation of evil in the movies (which, like Scott Derrickson said in the Christian horror article, is actually very illuminating), and partially because everything in horror culture was fun. When compared to how the idea of hell made me feel as a kid, any terrible thing - torture, losing a loved one, oblivion, possession or being stalked by a masked killer - seemed like an interesting diversion. It's not like my fear of hell made me immune to fear overall, but I guess that it did numb me to it in certain areas. I do believe that anybody who has grown up in a religious environment can see the link between religion and horror, and I find that link to be as fascinating as, uh .. hell.

Josh Austin – Newnan, Georgia

I WAS SERIOUSLY DISAPPOINTED to see that your newest issue (*RM#87*) was, first off, smaller than before, and, second, more expensive. How is it that, in an economy like ours, you can, with a clear conscience, raise the price of your mag? I had hoped that when you all went to eleven issues you wouldn't turn into *Fangoria*, but it seems my nightmare has come true. I have to say that *Rue Morgue Magazine* will have to be scratched from my monthly list of purchases. You have forced my hand in this matter not necessarily because of money, but for your desire to push your customers to pay more in tough times. You have terrible timing.

Don Bellville – address withheld

From our publisher. Hi Don, thanks for your letter. However, you may have overlooked the obvious. the reasons for the changes you see in Rue Morgue *are precisely due to the current economy, which has forced us to implement various adjustments to ensure the magazine's ongoing financial health. Should you choose to subscribe, you will be saving over 30% off the newsstand price which means you will only pay $6.81 per issue.*

JOVANKA, I just wanted to drop you an email to tell you how moved I was by your elegant elegy of Forry Ackerman at the Egyptian Theater in Hollywood. Your emotional speech really was heartfelt and it seems like there are a lot of people like us – scary thought!

Fred Godlash – Los Angeles, California

CORRECTION Last issue we misidentified the editors of *The Twilight and Other Zones*. It was in fact edited by Stanley Wiater, Matthew R. Bradley and Paul Stuve.

WE ENCOURAGE READERS TO SEND THEIR COMMENTS VIA MAIL OR EMAIL. LETTERS MAY BE EDITED FOR LENGTH AND/OR CONTENT. PLEASE SEND TO INFO@RUE-MORGUE.COM OR

POST MORTEM

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Dreadlines

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS HORROR HAPPENINGS

GENRE FANS AND ICONS GIVE HOLLYWOOD SEND OFF TO FORREST J ACKERMAN

On Sunday, March 8 Grauman's Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood was host to a loving farewell to a genre legend – literary agent, fiction writer, memorabilia collector and former *Famous Monsters of Filmland* editor Forrest J Ackerman, who passed away on December 4, 2008 at the age of 92. Filmmakers, writers, producers, actors and members of the public gathered for an afternoon dedicated to the man affectionately known as "Uncle Forry."

As per Ackerman's wishes, there was no memorial service. Instead, a public tribute was organized by several of his closest friends, including filmmaker Tim Sullivan, writer/director/producer Kevin Burns, writer Dan Madigan and filmmaker/musician Joe Moe, who was also Ackerman's caretaker.

A Tribute to Forrest J Ackerman commenced in the afternoon as attendees on the guest list were ushered in early to mingle around the catering tables in the lobby, view several items from Ackerman's collection (which were then auctioned off on April 31 and May 1) and get settled before the 616-seat theatre was opened up at 3 p.m. to the hundreds of others waiting outside.

Sullivan acted as Master of Ceremonies and introduced the speakers, the first of which was one of Ackerman's oldest friends, 88-year-old Ray Bradbury. After receiving a standing ovation, he described how Ackerman fostered his career as a science fiction writer by introducing him to key people in the industry and paying for him to attend conventions when he was broke. The wheelchair-bound author, who broke down while lamenting the loss of his friend, proclaimed that, "Without Forry, there would be no Ray Bradbury."

Filmmaker John Landis, who often cast Ackerman in cameos in his films, including *Schlock*, Michael Jackson's "Thriller" music video and *Innocent Blood*, followed with a more lighthearted speech. He recounted how Ackerman introduced him to filmmaker Ed Wood, that he was practically the only person to embrace the artificial language of Esperanto, and made jokes about Scientology, pointing out that Ackerman was once literary agent to the religion's founder, L. Ron Hubbard. Landis also pointed out Ackerman's political affiliations, noting that he refused to die until he was able to vote for Obama, which he did. As well, Landis read a letter sent from Ray Harryhausen in England, which highlighted a long-time friendship between the two men (that started over a mutual love of *King Kong*), and another one from Stephen King that simply stated, "Just tell them I love the man."



Forrest J Ackerman's glasses sit upon his life cast, surrounded by other likenesses on display at his tribute

Landis was followed by sci-fi and horror expert Bill Warren, who wrote *The Evil Dead Companion*, the two-volume *Keep Watching the Skies! American Science Fiction Movies of the Fifties* and scripts for Warren Publications titles *Creepy*, *Eerie* and *Vampirella* (the title character was created by Ackerman). Warren discussed Ackerman's importance to the genre, particularly in its infancy, and touched upon a letter-writing fight that he once had with H.P. Lovecraft. He tearfully concluded by telling the audience that while visiting Ackerman in his final weeks, "I was able to tell him that he meant more to me than my father did."

Director Paul Davids took the stage after Warren and described Ackerman's affection for producer/director George Pal (*When Worlds Collide*, the original *War of the Worlds* and the 1960 ver-





Forry's Friends: *(left to right) John Landis, Rick Baker, Guillermo del Toro and Joe Moe were among the many genre luminaries who spoke at the event*

sion of *The Time Machine*) Davids screened a section of his documentary, *The Sci-Fi Boys*, in which Ackerman travels to Pal's gravesite to re-read the eulogy he'd presented at the filmmaker's funeral in 1980

The award-winning sci-fi author Brad Linaweaver (*Sliders*, *Moon of Ice*, *The Land Beyond Summer*), who co-authored *Worlds of Tomorrow: The Amazing Universe of Science Fiction Art* with Ackerman in 2004, praised him as a someone who brought genre fans together. "He's the guy who introduced the monster fans to the spaceship fans. The science fiction and the horror genres collided and the survivors agreed that aliens were cool," said Linaweaver.

Director Guillermo Del Toro flew in from New Zealand, where he's currently working on his adaptation of *The Hobbit*, to attend the tribute. He described Ackerman as "a leviathan of perversion and monsters," adding, "For me he is God." Del Toro met Ackerman while in Los Angeles working on his first feature, *Cronos*; he described how they went for pie and remained friends.

"I wanted to visit him like one would want to visit the Eiffel Tower or the Mona Lisa while in Paris," admitted Del Toro. He also said that when he was a boy, he tried to send Ackerman a letter asking him to adopt him. "Unfortunately, my father intercepted the letter and beat the crap out of me."

Rue Morgue Editor-in-Chief Jovanka Vuckovic, who had travelled to Hollywood with nearly all of the magazine's staff, contrasted *Famous Monsters of Filmland* with *Rue Morgue*, comparing the "Monster Kid" fans of the former to the readers of the latter, who she labelled Forry's "Monster Grandkids."

The speeches were then paused for a video montage of Ackerman, created for the 2008 Monsterbash Convention, which featured footage of him interspersed with clips of some of his movie cameos throughout the decades, including appearances in *The Time Travelers*, *The Howling* and *Vampirella*.

Director Joe Dante (*Piranha*, *Gremlins*, *The 'burbs*) took to the podium next and discussed Ackerman in the context of Monster Kids culture. Dante bought the very first issue of *Famous Monsters* and had his first taste of fame when a letter he submitted to the magazine was published as an article.

"At the time, this magazine united a lot of us that didn't know there were other kids out there like us," said Dante. "It was a bonding thing. If you really look back on it, Forry changed the face of film culture. Forry was teaching us film culture when this genre that we love was being disparaged. I don't think Forry went to the grave realizing what an impact he had. We'll be putting a little nail in the coffins of our childhoods today."

Veteran effects artist Rick Baker (*Star Wars*, *An American Werewolf in London*, *Hellboy*) echoed this sentiment by talking about how Ackerman and *Famous Monsters* convinced him to pursue a dream of working in the movies. He said, "Forry did so much for so many of us. He entertained us, he inspired us, and for that I'll always be grateful."

The speeches were concluded by Burns, who is also executor of Ackerman's will. He revealed that *Famous Monsters* reprints are in the works, before breaking into impersonations of Ackerman.

Former *Famous Monsters* publisher Jim Warren was scheduled to speak but did not make it to the ceremony. Genre notables that were in the audience included actors Carla Laemmle (the original *Phantom of the Opera*), Joe Pilato (*Day of the Dead*), Anne Robinson (the original *War of the Worlds*), Angus Scrimm (*Phantasm*) and Brinke Stevens (*Hell Night*), filmmakers Mick Garris (*Masters of Horror*) and Kenneth Anger (*Lucifer Rising*); comic book creators Mike Mignola (*Hellboy*) and Steve Niles (*30 Days of Night*), musicians Johnny Legend and Nivek Ogre of Skinny Puppy, who was a long-time friend of Ackerman.

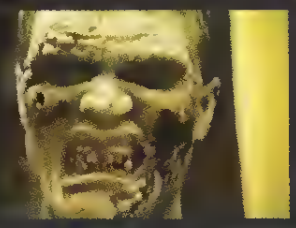
Burns remained onstage as Moe and several musicians performed a personalized version of one of Ackerman's favourite Al Jolson songs, "Sonny Boy," with the lyrics changed to "Forry Boy." Backed up by strings, Moe sang, accompanied by Burns (as Ackerman). The crowd joined in, and after the performance gave them a standing ovation.

The most powerful moment of the tribute, however, came at the very end, in the form of final words from the man himself, which were captured on video by Moe just days before Ackerman's death. The house lights went down and a very frail but smiling Ackerman appeared onscreen with the following message. "Hello fans, wherever you are. You are the treasures of my life, and this is Uncle Forry saying so long and thanks for everything. Sci-bye."

DAVE ALEXANDER



ROADKILL



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-RY8xWHYCGU

According to Tom Savini, this clip features footage from his personal *Day of the Dead* home videos, which were stolen when he lent the tapes out for inclusion in the bonus features on a DVD release. It features a zombie test makeup that he created in his basement on animatronics specialist Dave Kindlon, in all of its latex-y glory.

annekarsten.com/stuffed-monster-gallery

Much like how Dave Devries re-envisioned kids' drawings as fine art renderings, Anne Karston has taken the artwork of fourth and fifth graders and translated it into three-dimensional plush toys. You can view the whole "Stuffed Monsters" gallery, complete with before and after images, on her blog.

downloadhorror.com

Got a hankering to watch a horror film on your computer or iPod? Well, downloadhorror.com might be worth a peek if you are craving some low-budget fare. Despite the fact that the selection here is still pretty slim, they do offer DRM-free downloads. Seek out the schlock!

hyaenagallery.com

Horror art galore resides on the official website for Burbank, California's Hyaena Gallery. Much more than just a tool to promote upcoming exhibits, visitors to the site can also view and purchase artwork from a rogues gallery of horror artists, including Gris Grimly and Erick De La Vega. Eye candy lives here.

zombieliquorice.com

For those who like to wear their zombie-lovin' horror fandom loud and proud, consider sporting some Zombie Licorice swag. This Toronto upstart hit the ground running with a series of colourful, retro '80s-styled tees – guaranteed to freak out your conservative neighbours. Get into something gruesome!

Compiled by **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

Got a Roadkill suggestion? Email a link to **roadkill@rue-morgue.com**

CHICAGO THEATREGOERS BRACE FOR ZOMBIES

The phrase "'til death do us part" takes on extra significance this April when Chicago's WildClaw Theatre, which is staging a month-long run of playwright Scott T. Barsotti's *The Revenants*, a "relationship drama – with zombies."

The Revenants takes place in a near-future world where a global pandemic of zombie violence has led married friends Gary (Ryan Patrick Dolan) and Karen (Jenny Strubin) to seek shelter in an abandoned basement with their infected spouses Molly (Laura Hooper) and Joe (Brian Amidei). Trapped with their chained-up (and hungry) significant others, the increasingly desperate Gary and Karen have to decide just how far they are willing to go for love.

"This situation is evocative of many scenarios couples actually find themselves in," explains Barsotti. "A spouse becomes sick or injured or is rendered unable to communicate and interact normally; they suffer a stroke, coma, Alzheimer's or something like that. How do you move on when the person you love is still physically there, still alive .. or half-alive?"

A zombie fan who grew up in Pittsburgh – *Night of the Living Dead* director George A. Romero's hometown – he originally deemed the idea of zombies on stage as laughable. "How do you make that dramatic?" Yet the idea of his characters being trapped in a small space, with the threat of the undead looming just inches away from both them and the audience, convinced him of the scenario's potential.

"Just like the characters in the play, we have to look constantly at these shadows of people," Barsotti says. "And the rest came naturally – all of the emotional struggles and ethical dilemmas that would come with a situation like this are what make up the drama."

And it was drama, not the opportunity to drench audiences with stage blood à la *Evil Dead: The Musical*, which appealed to director Anne Adams.

"The human elements are what make this play scary and disturbing to me," she says. "The relationship between these four people is what attracted me to the script. The zombie elements are just the icing on the cake."



Laura Hooper as an undead wife in ***The Revenants***

This is not to say that Adams and Barsotti (who is heavily involved in the production) will be skimping on the karo syrup when it's in service to the story.

"My favourite horror films are the ones that have suspense and dread throughout, punctuated by moments of violence that are shocking because they're earned and given focus," says Barsotti. "I don't want the audience to get used to the violence or expect it. Blood and violence is in the fabric of the play, and by virtue of that it's important, but *The Revenants* is about the characters and the story."

It is this mix of spectacle and substance which has characterized WildClaw's approach to horror theatre since its founding in September 2007. Their previous adaptations have included Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* and H.P. Lovecraft's "The Dreams in the Witch House." For her part, Adams hopes *The Revenants* appeals to both Chicago's significant horror community and regular theatregoers.

"The horror crowd are the people who have supported WildClaw and made it what it is in such a short amount of time," she says. "But I am also really interested in recruiting some new followers. I myself was never into horror for a long time... which is why I am going to try extra hard to make this play appealing to both the diehard fan and the person on the fence. Fingers crossed!"

The Revenants runs until May 24 at Chicago's Angel Island Theatre (731 W. Sheridan). For more information visit wildclawtheatre.com.

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DARK SKY FILMS

CORONER'S REPORT

CASE NO. 89

WEIRD STATS MORBID FACTS

- Convicted murderer Clifton Bloomfield was on probation when he was cast as an extra in the Sony Pictures' prison drama *Felon*. No one involved with the project had any knowledge of his criminal past. A month after shooting wrapped he killed an elderly couple during a home invasion.

- Writer/director Paul Thomas Anderson (*There Will Be Blood*, *Boogie Nights*) is the son of horror host Ghoulardi (a.k.a. Ernie Anderson).

- Five coolers containing human heads were recently discovered under a ficus tree in the Mexican state of Jalisco. Additional death threats were written on the coolers' lids. Police suspect the murders are gang-related.

- Jack Nicholson used real-life mass murderer Charles Manson as part of his inspiration for his portrayal of Jack Torrance in *The Shining*.

- King Henry III began the practice of displaying corpses of executed felons as a deterrent during his 13th-century reign.

- Robert Florey (1932's *Murders in the Rue Morgue*) was originally chosen to direct *Frankenstein* (1931) but was let go following a disagreement concerning casting. He strongly felt that Bela Lugosi should play the role of Dr. Frankenstein.

- Taphephobia is defined as "the fear of being buried alive."

- *The Summer of the Shark*, *The Terror of the Monster* and *The Jaws of the Leviathan* were all working titles for Peter Benchley's iconic 1974 novel *Jaws*.

- Earlier this year, a man shopping at a Walmart store in Cape Cod was discovered ten human teeth in one of the compartments of a wallet he was perusing there.

- During comedian Redd Foxx's stint on *Sanford and Son* he popularized a gag in which he feigned a heart attack. When he suffered an actual heart attack in 1991 on the set of *The Royal Family*, cast and crew members thought he was performing the old gag and broke into laughter. By the time they realized their error, it was too late to save him.

- Englishman William Calcraft performed the job of hangman longer anyone else in recorded history, he held the position for 45 years.

- *The Horror of Party Beach* (1964) was promoted as "The First Horror Musical."

- When Michelangelo died, the pope of the day disregarded the artist's final wishes and had him interred in Vatican City. Years later, Michelangelo's nephew was able to abscond with the corpse and return it to Tuscany.

Compiled by **MONICA S. KUEBLER**

Got a weird stat or morbid fact? Send it through to: **info@rue-morgue.com**

THE RUE MORGUE SICK TOP SIX



ASSAULTS ON ASH

1. **EVIL DEAD II**
 THE ORIGINAL "RIGHT HAND OF DOOM"
2. **THE EVIL DEAD**
 DEADITE FIRE-POKER FLOGGING
3. **ARMY OF DARKNESS**
 DUPED BY DIMINUTIVE DOPPELGÄNGERS
4. **THE EVIL DEAD**
 CHOKED BY A HEADLESS HELLSPAWN
5. **EVIL DEAD II**
 BLOOD FLOOD FACIAL
6. **ARMY OF DARKNESS**
 SLAPPED AROUND BY SKELETONS



JAMES FISHER **zircocircus.com**

AMERICAN WASTE

:TWO DAYS OF HARDCORE & METAL IN KCMO.



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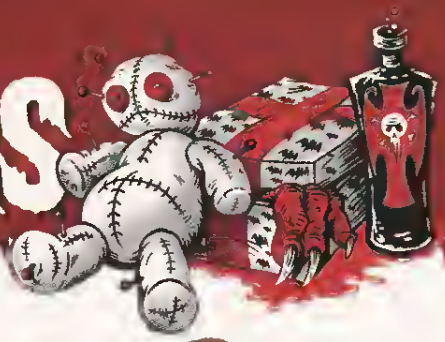
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COALESCE
EYES OF THE BETRAYER
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AT THE LEFT HAND OF GOD
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BATTLEFIELDS
SERATED
OLD IRONSIDE
ROMAN HOLIDAY
PARIA
BYLETH
THE CAST PATTERN
CONTINENT OF ASH
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1



2



3



4



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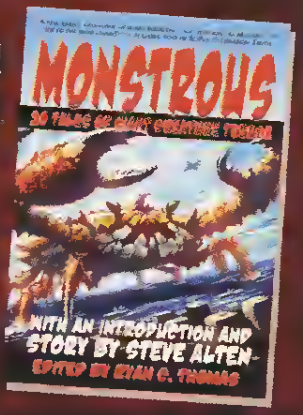
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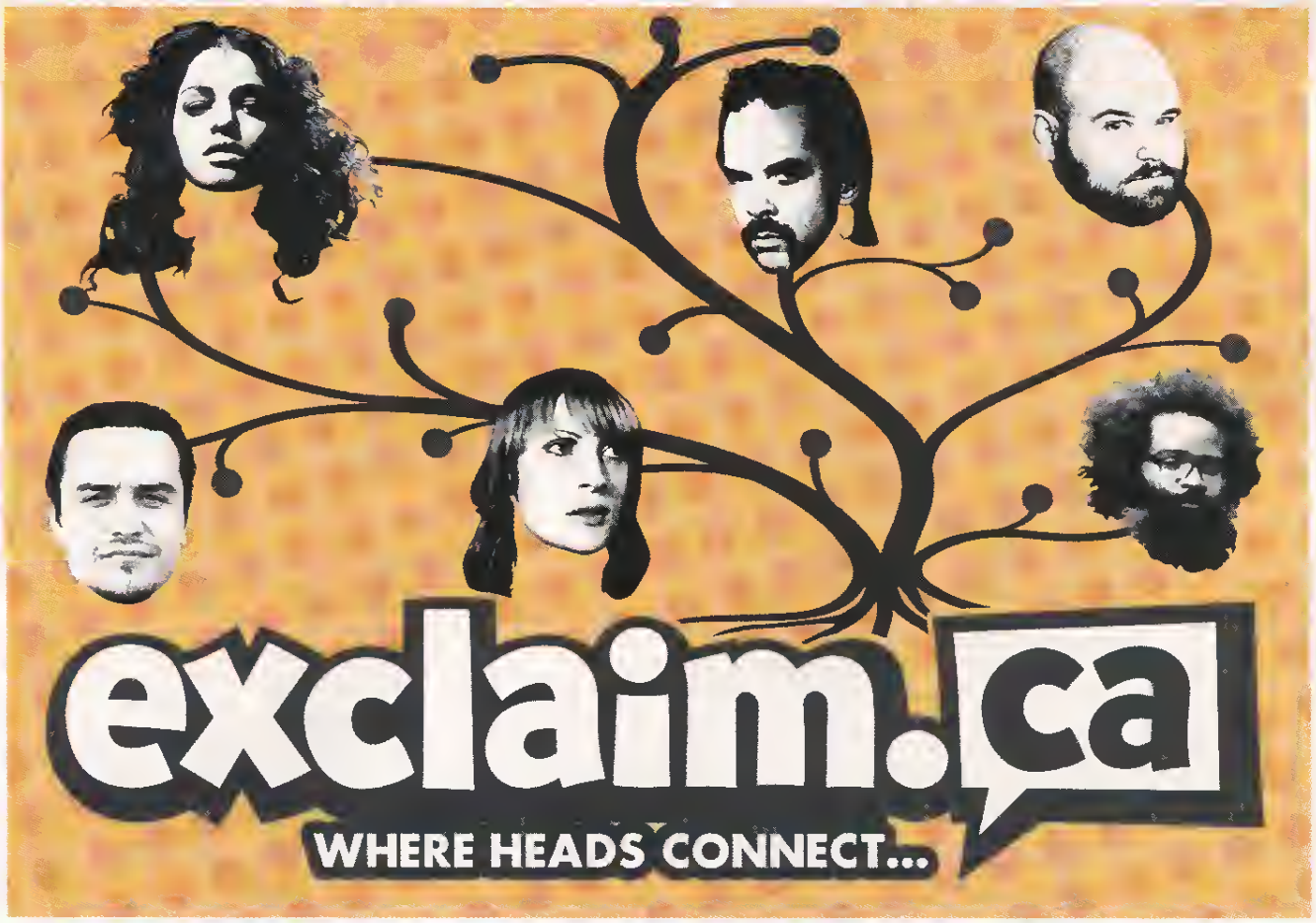


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RAIN REP

MORE THAN FIFTEEN YEARS AND THREE BLOCKBUSTER *SPIDER-MAN* MOVIES SINCE THE LAST *EVIL DEAD* FILM, **SAM RAIMI** RETURNS TO HIS LOW-BUDGET HORROR ROOTS WITH *DRAG ME TO HELL*

OSSESSED

BY PHIL BROWN

IN NOVEMBER 1979 THREE AMBITIOUS COLLEGE DROP-OUTS DROVE TO A CABIN IN THE TENNESSEE WOODS WITH A 16MM CAMERA AND A SMALL CAST AND CREW TO SHOOT A LOW-BUDGET HORROR MOVIE CALLED *THE BOOK OF THE DEAD.* The planned six-week shoot doubled to twelve and, by the end, writer/director Sam Raimi, lead actor Bruce Campbell and producer Rob Tapert were the only remaining members of the original production crew on set, flinging buckets of blood on each other and anyone else they could convince to come out for a night of shooting. When the film screened at the 1982 Cannes Film Festival as *The Evil Dead*, Stephen King proclaimed it "the most original horror film of the year." The grassroots production quickly become one of the most beloved horror movies of the '80s and launched the career of the truly singular talent that is Sam Raimi.

Though the original film transformed the amateur filmmaker into a bankable director, it wasn't really until the 1987 sequel *Evil Dead II* that Raimi's unique directorial voice became clear. While the sequel featured the same mocking demons, grisly gore and kinetic camerawork of *The Evil Dead*, this time the subtle gallows humour that flavoured the original film took over every scene, proving that if you smack a deadite in the head once, it's frightening, if you do it five times, it's slapstick, and if a bunch of bodily fluids shoot across the room, it's *splat*stick. Raimi crafted a movie that felt like a Grand Guignol play starring the Three Stooges, in which scenes could be simultaneously creepy and hilarious. It's easy to picture the diminutive director standing next to his camera, giggling with masochistic glee at the extreme situations he's putting his actors (and audience) through.

By the time *Army of Darkness* concluded the *Evil Dead* trilogy in 1992, comedy had fully taken over the franchise. While the supernatural elements of the series were intact, extreme gore and psychological torment had been replaced by physical gags and one-liners. It was clear Raimi was done with horror for the time being. He then went on to become one of the most successful directors in Hollywood, thanks mainly to his powerhouse *Spider-Man* franchise. (During this period, he also started Ghost House Pictures, which has produced an uneven roster of films not directed by Raimi, including *Boogeyman*, *30 Days of Night*, *The Messengers* and the North American *Grudge* franchise.)

Even though the *Spider-Man* movies and *Darkman* (1990) captured the hyper-stylized comic book reality of *The Evil Dead* films, and the thrillers *A Simple Plan* (1998) and *The Gift* (2000) showed off his knack for suspense, there has always been a tinge of disappointment in the hearts of horror fans as a result of losing Raimi to Hollywood. While filmmakers such as the Spierig Brothers (*Undead*), Edgar Wright (*Shaun of the Dead*) and Peter Jackson (who as recently as *King Kong* echoed Raimi in the film's gooey giant insect battle) have continued Raimi's tradition of spurting splatstick, there has always been the hope that Raimi himself would one day return to his roots. Apparently he felt the same way, because the director had secretly been working on another low-budget demonic horror movie for years with his brother and writing partner Ivan Raimi (see p.19). The pair finally decided to bring *Drag Me to H* to life, with Raimi in the director's chair.

Drag Me to Hell, which hits North American theatres May 29 (from Universal), is the tal[e] of Christine (Alison Lohman), a young loan officer who makes the wo[r]st decision of her life when she turns down a decrepit old woman's loan request in an attempt to further her career. The woman just happens to be a gypsy who dabbles in the dark arts and she

places a curse on Christine. Soon our heroine is pursued by the unrelenting demon Lamia, who plans to drag her to hell within 72 hours. Not particularly thrilled with this arrangement, Christine sets out to rid herself of the curse; to that end we see her attend a séance with a laughing goat, dig up a rotting corpse, and fight for her life with… a stapler. It's just the sort of ludicrous high-energy horror that Raimi is a natural at putting on the big screen.

Drag Me to Hell is also a welcome return to form in other ways. The director will be ditching the big-budget, CGI-enhanced slickness of his blockbuster fare to tell a smaller-scale horror story with practical effects by KNB (see p.20). It may lack Bruce Campbell and his iconic boomstick, but *Drag Me to Hell* still sees a beloved director back in the genre he knows all too well.

Rue Morgue gets Raimi to take a break from the editing suite to drag us through the world of his long-awaited return to horror.

FIRST UP, THE MOST OBVIOUS QUESTION: WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO RETURN TO HORROR AFTER ALL THESE YEARS?

I just wanted to do a horror picture. They're fun to experience for the audience and I appreciate the craftsmanship that goes into making one. I thought it would be great to return to a lower budget and a tiny crew to get back to the basics of filmmaking on a realistically small schedule with limited resources. I wanted to try my hand at another campfire tale.

"I THINK THIS FILM IS ITS OWN SICK CREATURE. IT IS PRIMARILY A HORROR FILM, BUT THERE ARE A LOT OF ELEMENTS OF HUMOUR."

DID YOU HAVE THINGS TO WORK OUT OF YOUR SYSTEM THAT YOU JUST CAN'T DO IN A SPIDEY FILM? BLOODSHED AND SPANDEX-CLAD HEROES DON'T TEND TO MIX.

I don't know if I ever looked at it as horror vs. *Spider-Man*. Just being on a much smaller budget and not having a release date before making the movie frees me up quite a bit as a storyteller. It was nice to have no expectations as to what the movie should be and not to have any beloved heroes that I was in danger of messing up for people. I felt much more free making this picture.

WHAT LED YOU TO THIS PARTICULAR STORY FOR YOUR RETURN TO HORROR?

It was something that I had written with my brother Ivan that just sat on the shelf as a short story for years. Then, around 1994, he and I developed it into a short treatment, and around 2002 we decided to write it into full-length screenplay. So for years

SAM RAIMI

it was just there and it was something that was always a part of me, like anything that you write. The opportunity came up to direct it and I realized that it really was something that I was right for.

WAS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC ABOUT THE MATERIAL THAT MADE YOU WANT TO DIRECT THIS MOVIE?

Well, when you write something you get very connected to the characters and their predicaments. The more you write it, the more it comes alive in your head and the more you're forced to imagine, experience and develop every moment of the two-hour piece. So it wasn't that there was something specific about it that I liked. That would be too general of a statement for me to make. I would just say that it was something that was a part of me and the opportunity came about to actually make it as a director when I couldn't make it any other way. I tried to make it with another director, but I kept having to cut the script because we couldn't get the money for the whole thing. The one way to preserve it was by directing it myself, so I decided to do that.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THE TONE OF *DRAG ME TO HELL*? IS IT MORE LIKE *EVIL DEAD* OR *ARMY OF DARKNESS*?

I think this film is its own sick creature. It is primarily a horror film, but there are a lot of elements of humour. There is black humour, there are some over-the-top situations, and plenty of scenes that if they come off right will hopefully make the audience really squirm.

THERE HAVE BEEN RUMBLINGS THAT *DRAG ME TO HELL* IS A THROWBACK TO '80S LATEX HORROR, IS THIS TRUE?

The main effects will be the KNB creature effects. They are augmented and supported at times by digital effects, but the main effects are all of the makeup effects variety. It seemed like it was the choice we wanted to go with because we so love the artistry of the team over there. I didn't want this movie to seem like a modern digital creation. It really needed warmer, more old-fashioned makeup effects.

YOUR COMPANY, GHOST HOUSE PICTURES, HAS BEEN BEHIND SEVERAL J-HORROR-STYLE PROJECTS. HOW MUCH IS *DRAG ME TO HELL* INFORMED BY THE J-HORROR CYCLE, IF AT ALL?

I love Takashi Shimizu's *Ju-on*. I also love *Ringu*, which is a brilliant Japanese film, and the American version of it. But I don't think that this film was influenced by them, probably because it was written several years before I saw those films. I really do love those films, but *this* is more of a... um... actually I don't know what it is.

IN WHAT WAY DO GENRE TRENDS AND FAN EXPECTATIONS INFLUENCE YOU AS A DIRECTOR?

I'm aware of some of the individual horror films that come out, but not a tremendous amount. I do see the popular ones and I like them. I'm probably less aware of the trends from a social point of view and what the movements are, so it's hard to really say how I've been influenced by them. I'm just a product of our society and culture. And, like everyone, I'm influenced by the films we see and the times we live in.

DID YOU FEEL A NEED TO CHANGE YOUR APPROACH TO HORROR FILMMAKING FOR CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCES?

I didn't really look at it like, "Should I make the movie the old fashioned way or should I make it the new way?" I more or less focused on my shot lists and storyboards to try to figure out the best presentation for any particular moment or sequence. Sometimes I used techniques that I learned long ago in my early horror films and other times I used techniques that I learned more recently on these *Spider-Man* films. But I didn't really make conscious decisions to say, "I need to develop a new technique for this or I'll use an old tool here." It was really just about imagining the sequence in a particular way and trying to communicate that vision to everyone involved.

HAVE YOU ENJOYED PLAYING *DRAG ME TO HELL* FOR AUDIENCES AND SEEING HOW THEY REACT? I'VE READ THAT ADVANCE SCREENINGS HAVE BEEN A BIT NERVE-WRACKING FOR YOU.



Conjuring Lamia: *Christine (Alison Lohman) attends a séance in an attempt to rid herself of the curse.*

Photo by Melissa Moseley



WHEN SAM RAIMI NEEDED A MAKEUP FX CREW FOR *DRAG ME TO HELL*, HE LOOKED NO FURTHER THAN **GREG NICOTERO** AND **KNB EFFECTS**, THE TEAM THAT BROUGHT YOU THE CANDARIAN DEMONS AND DEADITES THAT POPULATED *EVIL DEAD II* AND *ARMY OF DARKNESS*.

PRACTICALLY DEAD

BY JOVANKA VUCKOVIC

SAM SAYS THAT THE EFFECTS ON *DRAG ME TO HELL* ARE PRIMARILY PRACTICAL. DID YOU SUGGEST HE GO THE TRADITIONAL ROUTE?

Well, when we went through our initial meeting we split out what we felt we could do practically. I certainly didn't disagree because I was excited about the idea of doing different puppet heads. With [gypsy woman] Mrs. Ganush, we probably did five or six puppets of her for different actions. I love that Sam wanted the movie to have that feel. I'm not going to use the word "old school" because to me that always gives the connotation that people don't use puppets anymore. They still do. So Sam was basically like, "Okay, what are the best tools to pull off the shot? If I need to smash her face into the dashboard or if I need Mrs. Ganush to basically look like she's engulfing half of [lead actress] Alison [Lohman's] face, how do we do it?" I'm like, "We'll do a great puppet head." And we shot every single one of them.

WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING THING YOU WERE ASKED TO DO?

Some of the stuff that was challenging is stuff that you won't even notice. The basic premise of the movie involves an old woman who is shamed by Alison's character, Christine, so she puts a curse on her. So, there's this really violent fight between the two of them at the beginning of the movie, in a car.

I HEARD THAT FIGHT RIVALS THE BOG WITCH SCENE IN *ARMY OF DARKNESS*.

[Laughs] It's pretty intense. It took a week to shoot because it happens inside a car. You know, the physical effects guys, Jim Schwalm and John Frazier, had to build, like, five different versions of this car that could come apart to fit the camera in! Then we had Lorna Raver, who played Mrs. Ganush; we had to do a likeness makeup on a stunt girl to match Lorna. And the likeness makeup on her was so fantastic – it was one of the best likeness makeups I've ever seen – that there were times when Sam walked up to the stunt girl thinking it was Lorna. I was really, really proud of that because it's something that allowed the scene to be as intense and violent as it needed to be.

WHAT KIND OF SILLY GAGS DID YOU GUYS COME UP WITH?

Some of the gags in the movie came out of conversations between Sam and I. As I was reading through the script and going through stuff with Sam, I read a particularly ridiculous gag during that same car fight – where Alison is in the front seat fighting with Mrs. Ganush – and she looks on the seat next to her and there's a stapler, so she basically grabs the stapler and starts stapling Mrs. Ganush in the head to try to get her off of her back. As I'm reading through it, Sam just sits there and starts laughing. And he'd just look up and go, "Uh, who wrote this? What the hell are we doing?"

HE AND HIS BROTHER IVAN DID!

Exactly! Then you have to be like, "Uh, I don't know. I think *you* wrote it, didn't you?"

SPEAKING OF RIDICULOUSNESS, WHAT CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT THE TALKING GOAT PUPPET?

[Laughs] No Sam Raimi movie would be complete without an exorcism or a pos-

session sequence. With the possession scene, one of the fun things is that they're trying to figure out how to get the demon, or the curse, off of Christine. So one of the ideas that they have is, "Okay, what we're gonna do is have this exorcism and we're gonna pull the curse out of you and then we're gonna put the curse into this goat, and then we're gonna kill the goat."

AND HOW DOES THAT PLAY OUT?

[Laughs] You literally have a sequence where the goat is possessed by the demon. And it starts talking and going, "We're gonna swallow your soul!" It was so much fun, I mean, just puppeteering. And of course, Sam's making up the dialogue while we're doing it because the goat required six puppeteers. We [also] had a hand puppet and a full goat that had a normal goat head plus a possessed goat head. It could do its dialogue so Sam was like, "You're a black-hearted whore!" He's making up all of this dialogue and we're lip-syncing the puppets to the dialogue.

SO BASED ON WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, IT'S SAFE TO CALL *DRAG ME TO HELL* A HORROR-COMEDY.

Um… I would call it a "horror-comedy." I mean, would you call *Evil Dead II* a horror-comedy?

YEAH. ONE OF SAM'S GIFTS IS THE ABILITY TO MAKE PEOPLE LAUGH AND GAG DURING THE SAME GORE SEQUENCE, YOU KNOW?

Then I would call this a horror-comedy. It has Sam's fingerprints all over it. You read the script, then you look at the storyboards, and the storyboards have so much more flavour and depth to them because of what Sam brings to the table. Then you get on set and there are the little nuances of, "Okay, this is the scene where the evil force is chasing Allison around the house" and there are subtle things like shadow-play on the wall or plants moving with a little bit of wind, or curtains blowing dramatically. He really knows how to layer his sequences with these great little nuances.

SAM'S EARLY HORROR FILMS ARE PRETTY OVER-THE-TOP. CAN WE EXPECT TO SEE ANYTHING PARTICULARLY MESSY IN THIS MOVIE OR WOULD YOU JUST SAY IT'S MORE FUN?

It's more fun. It's certainly not gory, there's not a lot of blood because Sam's sensibilities in terms of what he can get away with ratings-wise, I think, have very much changed. Listen, *Army of Darkness* is very fun and very over-the-top but certainly not very gory. I would put it more in the *Army of Darkness* realm than I would *Evil Dead II*.

BEING THAT IT WAS AN ALLEGED $2 MILLION SHOOT, WHICH IS EXTREMELY LOW COMPARED TO *SPIDER-MAN*'S ROUGHLY $300 MILLION, WAS BUDGET EVER A HUGE CONSIDERATION IN TERMS OF WHAT YOU COULD PULL OFF?

It was. This is certainly the lowest budget that he's had in a long time. So there were budgetary issues that we had to deal with, but ultimately I have to say that the producers on the show supported Sam's vision. So I never felt like I was getting beat up, price-wise.

I KNOW YOU WERE SUPERVISING, BUT DID YOU GET YOUR HANDS DIRTY AT ALL?

In the end sequence, we get into a scene in a cemetery where Christine realizes that one of her last hopes is to dig up a corpse because she realizes she has some business that she has to deal with. It's a really elaborately designed sequence in terms of having to build a fake cemetery set where it's raining and there's mud pouring in, and we had some puppet work to do in this grave that's filling up with mud and water. So I put on a wetsuit and jumped in. It made me happy that Sam recognized that part of the reason that this company has been around for 21 years is that I don't mind getting bloody, I don't mind getting wet, I don't mind getting dirty. I'll jump in there and do what needs to be done. And, you know, that's a tribute to the loyalty I have to Sam.

"NO SAM RAIMI MOVIE WOULD BE COMPLETE WITHOUT AN EXORCISM OR A POSSESSION SEQUENCE."

GREG NICOTERO

YOU PLAYED ASH'S SEVERED HAND AMONG OTHER THINGS IN *EVIL DEAD II*. DO YOU HAVE ANY BODY PART CAMEOS IN *DRAG ME TO HELL*?

I don't think I have any body part cameos this time but [*Evil Dead II* writer] Scott Spiegel does. He plays a gypsy with bad teeth. Sam asked me to make an appearance but I was too busy working on the movie.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE MEMORY OF THE SHOOT?

There's a great sequence [*description cut to avoid spoilers – Ed.*] that we discussed with Sam and he said, "That's the grossest thing I've ever heard, we have to do it!" Basically we cooked different types of spaghetti in tinted water so we could make earthworms and maggots and all kinds of gross stuff. Then we mixed it with slime. When we did the test here at the shop we literally blasted about two gallons of slime and coffee grounds and stuff into my [volunteer employee's] mouth. She turned toward the camera and spilled out a whole mouthful of stuff. It was so great. We took it over to Sam and he was like, "What are you guys doing? How could you do that to that poor girl?" I was like, "What are you talking about? You're going to do it to your lead actress! This was a willing participant!" It's no secret, Sam loves torturing his actors.

ESPECIALLY BRUCE CAMPBELL.

Especially Bruce Campbell.

ARE YOU PLANNING ON HELPING HIM ACHIEVE THAT NOBLE GOAL YET AGAIN FOR *EVIL DEAD 4*? I KNOW IVAN'S BEEN WRITING...

I would certainly hope so. I think there is definitely a continuity that we would provide considering that we were involved with *Evil Dead II* and *Army of Darkness*. Certainly Sam has mentioned it in passing, but he's never been very specific about it. There's nothing written in stone as far as I know but I would certainly be delighted to help Sam torture Bruce again.



Possessed Puppet: Evil Dead II, torturing the Henrietta puppet

Photo courtesy Greg N



Yes, it's been a lot of fun. It's also been nerve-wracking because I'm hoping that they'll like it. So far they've been enjoying it, and it's a lot of fun to be in an audience when the scares work.

YOU'VE SEEM TO ENJOY TORTURING YOUR ACTORS ON THE SET; OIO THAT CONTINUE IN *DRAG ME TO HELL*? IT SEEMS LIKE YOU'O GET MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO TORTURE ACTORS IN A HORROR FILM.
Horror movies are a great excuse for tormenting people that act in the film. In this picture, they literally have to take demonic abuse, so it loosens up the director's hand and encourages you to not just throw bits of fake concrete at the guy playing Spider-Man. You can warm up with buckets of blood and then really get into more viscous fluids. It's a horror picture.

IS TORTURING ANY ACTOR AS FUN AS TORTURING BRUCE CAMPBELL?
No, he's the best of the bunch to torture. It's almost like he cries out for it.

DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO PUT HIM THROUGH HELL IN A STARRING ROLE AGAIN?
I'm always happy to work with Bruce. Right now there's nothing for Bruce and I to do, but I'm always looking for a way to work with him.

HOW TIREO ARE YOU OF FIELOING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF *EVIL DEAD 4* ANO WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO OO THAT ONE MORE TIME?
I'm not tired of the questions. I'm afraid that people are tired of having me answer them. That's the truth. I keep opening my mouth and saying the wrong thing and fans get mad at me. It's not that I'm tired of it. I just don't have anything new to say about it that won't get people mad.

THE *EVIL DEAD* SERIES HAS GONE FROM CULT OOOITY TO A MAINSTREAM SUCCESS WITH ALL THE TOYS, T-SHIRTS ANO THE MUSICAL. WHAT'S IT BEEN LIKE TO SEE THAT HAPPEN?
It's been incredibly surprising. It still continues to amaze and baffle me. It really speaks volumes about the degradation of our society. Bruce Campbell, Rob Tapert and myself had no idea that *Evil Dead* would still be around today. We were just trying to make a film of a high enough quality that it could be shown at the drive-in theatres in Michigan [Raimi's home state] at the time. If it survived that two-month play date from June to August 1982, we would have been very happy. We had no idea that it would still be playing almost 30 years later.

DIO YOU FEEL THE NEEO TO TAILOR *DRAG ME TO HELL* FOR THE *EVIL DEAD* FANS AT ALL SINCE SO MANY OF THEM WILL BE ANXIOUS TO SEE YOU OIRECTING ANOTHER HORROR MOVIE?
Well, I was aware that I had been treated well by a lot of people who like those *Evil Dead* movies, so I hoped that they would like this film. I appreciate those fans very much. But the thing about those movies is that I really tried to make the second one different than the first one and the third one different than the second. I think part of what the *Evil Dead* audience likes is trying something new, a different flavour. So as much as I wanted them to like it, I knew I couldn't insult them by giving them something they've had before. I hope they like it, but I also tried to make it as different as possible. These have been tough questions. Do you have any multiple choice questions, or true or false?

SURE. I AM GOING TO LIKE *DRAG ME TO HELL*. TRUE OR FALSE?
True, it's false.

IS THIS A OIP BACK INTO HORROR BEFORE CONTINUING ON WITH BIGGER BUOGET FARE OR WOULO YOU LIKE TO RETURN TO THE GENRE REGULARLY?
I would love to. I love all genres of films. I like westerns, detective stories, even science fiction. It depends entirely on how this one is received. I'd like to make another horror movie. We'll see.

ARE THERE ANY GENRE NEWCOMERS THAT HAVE CAUGHT YOUR EYE LATELY, ANO WHY?
Oh… um… let's see… [long pause] I recently saw James Whale's *Bride of Frankenstein*. That was awesome. I also, I didn't see the whole thing, but I saw some of Tobe Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. I don't know if you've heard of that one. That's an incredibly well-crafted film.



"HORROR MOVIES ARE A GREAT EXCUSE FOR TORMENTING PEOPLE THAT ACT IN THE FILM."
– SAM RAIMI

FROM THE $300,000 *EVIL DEAD* TO THE $300 MILLION *SPIDER MAN 3*, FILMMAKING IS A FAMILY AFFAIR FOR MICHIGAN'S RAIMI CLAN. WRITER **IVAN RAIMI** GIVES *RUE MORGUE* THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY OF *DRAG ME TO HELL*

THE FAMILY THAT SLAYS TOGETHER...

BY JOSEPH O'BRIEN



"WHAT I LIKE ABOUT *DRAG ME TO HELL* IS THAT IT'S KIND OF DUMB," says Ivan Raimi, an ER doctor and screenwriter who has collaborated with his younger brother Sam on *Army of Darkness*, *Darkman* and all three *Spider-Man* movies.

Don't misunderstand. He's not putting the movie down; in the vernacular of the brothers Raimi (this also includes the younger Ted Raimi – he's acted in most of Sam's movies), who made their mark with *The Evil Dead*, the quintessential "dumb" horror movie and its two even "dumber" sequels, this is high praise indeed. *Drag Me To Hell*'s life began during a break in development on their first collaboration, 1990's *Darkman*.

"We just decided to write some little horror story," Raimi recalls. "Just a short story, about a witch, I believe was our first thought, and what would you do to make a witch upset."

The tale that ultimately emerged was refreshingly simple and, well, dumb: "*Drag Me To Hell* is about the horrible situation that a young woman, Christine, is placed in as she tries to get ahead in her life," says Raimi of the film's protagonist, a loan officer played by Alison Lohman. "She's someone who's trying to remake herself into something better. She has to turn down a loan to an old gypsy woman; this greatly shames the old woman, who has to beg for the first time in her life. She places a curse on the girl – an old-style curse where demons are summoned to torment her over three days with the eventual goal of dragging her soul to hell. It's the story of the lengths people will go to to save themselves."

"Torment" is another word that comes up a lot in the family vocabulary. It's something Ivan and his brother delighted in inflicting on their heroine – in classic Raimi style.

"The torment she gets is good old-fashioned demon blunt trauma," Raimi says. "But there's also her psychological disintegration, and how she's forced to look very bad in front of the people she's trying to impress. But this demon isn't so much interested in making her look bad as it is in giving her a taste of hell."

The Raimi Brothers revisited the story a number of times over the years, but were diverted by more pressing projects on Sam's slate. They finally set it on the path to production after *Spider-Man 3*, with a draft tailored for Sam and producer Rob Tapert's genre-centric production company Ghost House. They brought in former *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* producer Marti Noxon for rewrites. She introduced a subplot and gave the film a more solid three-act structure. Despite this, however, the brothers couldn't shake the sense that something had been lost in translation.

"In the end, what the story was about was a gritty little battle between a young farm girl who comes to LA and a witch," Raimi says of their decision to pull back from Noxon's polish. "We kind of liked the more direct, dumb, stupid version. There just wasn't that much to it. It's sort of like serving up spaghetti and meatballs to your family but trying to pretend it's some full-course meal."

Besides dumbness and torment, the third factor common to classic Raimi clan endeavours is humour. And while *Drag Me To Hell* isn't an *Evil Dead II*-style horror-comedy, there are macabre laughs to be had.

"We don't really think 'We want to make this funny or scary,' but sometimes something happens and we like it when we don't know if it's funny or scary or awful or all of those things," Raimi reveals. "It's like Ash in *Evil Dead*. You love and you hate him. It's like having a dumb bully from high school as your best friend. You're glad he's there but at the same time you're a little embarrassed."

While fans of Bruce Campbell will be disappointed that The Chin does not appear (due to a conflict in Campbell's scheduling with his current television project *Burn Notice*), Raimi does, however, deliver some surprising news on the current state of the long-moribund *Evil Dead* franchise.

"We want to do *Evil Dead 4* with Bruce. It's sort of like this story that refuses to die, it wants our attention. And we want to go back to it. I can't tell you exactly when, but we always think about it and we've been writing it in little fragments. We have ideas, I don't know if you'd call it a story yet. It's something we want to do, we just can't get to it at the moment."

英名三十八衆句

稽田九蔵
新助

鉸鑠をふりまわす色の厨こぬ吾子

盛春の誇り小間乃花
一衰秋を悲む大井の月
夜の夢を破る鐵棒の音
厄日當強し稲葉乃風
逆に裁つ鮭の手料理
庖丁躙切り入西瓜の割方
分が遺恨の
追善俎板

宿離れ
別荘り
出せり

應需
可史山人

GRAVEN IMAGES

The ART OF JAPANESE BLOODY UKIYO-E WOODCUTTING

BY JASON LAPEYRE

MOST WESTERNERS HAVE AT LEAST A PASSING FAMILIARITY WITH THE CLASSICAL JAPANESE ART PRINTS CALLED UKIYO-E. THEY HANG IN MUSEUMS AND ARE PRAISED FOR THEIR DELICATE MINIMALISM AND FORMAL BEAUTY, MOST OFTEN DEPICTING SAMURAIS, GEISHAS AND MOUNT FUJI.

What isn't as commonly known is that these 17th-century prints weren't created as high art, but were made quickly and sold cheaply, reflecting the tastes and interests of Japan's first middle class. Images of kabuki actors, popular legends, beautiful women and romantic landscapes hung on the walls of tiny shops and houses in the rapidly crowding cities of Tokyo and Osaka. And among these thousands of *ukiyo-e* were the first mass-produced images of Japanese horror.

Historical forces converged to produce Japan's first urban culture when Tokyo was destroyed in the great fire of 1657 and the city intentionally rebuilt itself as a modern, bustling, sophisticated capital. The aristocracy in their palaces had cut themselves off from the lowly merchants, artisans and samurai living in the city, so these urbanites were left to create their own culture. They had money, they could read, and they had an unlimited appetite for kabuki theatre, novels, poetry, art, sex, food, alcohol, money and romance. Buddhists at the time called this new urban culture *ukiyo*, "the floating world," an environment of superficiality and earthly, fleeting pleasures that would never lead to enlightenment. The urbanites laughed and agreed and ordered another round, cheerfully adopting the name to describe themselves.

Soon artists and publishers started using woodblock printing techniques to mass-produce art that depicted this urban culture, they called it *ukiyo-e*: pictures of the floating world.

"*Ukiyo-e* represents a unique development in Japanese art, a great renaissance based upon a largely popular foundation," wrote the late art historian Richard Lane in his 1978 book *Images From the Floating World* (Dorset Press). Artists churned out images to satisfy demand, from beautiful women to popular actors. Using carved wooden blocks, publishers could print about 300 copies of an image before the wood began to wear down. In addition to stand-alone prints, *ukiyo-e* techniques were used to illustrate pulp novels, called *yomi-hon*. And right from the beginning, there was an appetite for horror.

As Lane pointed out in his book *Hokusai: Life and Work* (E.P. Dutton, 1989), publishers were pushed away from political satire by government censorship, so "novelists livened up their work with the supernatural, the fantastic, the terrifying, the violent, even the voyeuristic and sadistic." He described these books as gothic and grotesque, with "numerous scenes of torture and bloody death."

Many popular *ukiyo-e* artists of the day were kept busy making lurid images for the books, none more so than Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849). Hokusai is one of the most popular Japanese artists of all time, and his print The Great Wave Off Kanagawa is probably the most famous work in the history of Japanese art. But he was



The Earth Spider Slain By The Hero Raiko's Retainers (1838) by Kuniyoshi, and (opposite) a print from ***28 Scenes of Murder and Verse*** *(1866) by Yoshitoshi*



no celebrated artist. Perpetually broke, he was a wandering eccentric who spent an entire decade working only on *yomi-hon* illustrations, drawing endless giant spiders, shimmering ghosts and three-eyed demons. He made around 8000 images in his lifetime, and his range of interests and commitment were epic, as was the depth of his perversion and twisted imagination.

"With his insatiable curiosity about all varieties of human and artistic experience, it was only natural that Hokusai should have turned to *shunga*, the branch of *ukiyo*-e devoted to erotica," wrote Lane of one of Hokusai's most enigmatic images, The Dream Of The Fisherman's Wife" (c.1820). This early take on "tentacle porn" lies somewhere between menacing and erotic, depicting two octopi performing cunnilingus on a diving girl. In a more directly sinister vein is his series The Ghost Prints – pictures drawn from popular kabuki plays and famous Japanese ghost stories. One of these is Laughing Hannya (c 1830), an image of a chuckling demon-witch eating a baby's severed head as if it were an apple. The painting is incredible, the witch almost mocking the viewer's squeamishness as it points to the tiny head, blood splashed on its face.

The most reliable source of income for *ukiyo-e* publishers was portraits of actors, a reflection of kabuki's huge popularity. One of the most popular genres in kabuki was the ghost story, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi (1797-1861) had a gift for translating the dramatic action of the stage to his prints. He manifested some of the most frightening images and stories from kabuki plays and historical legends as surprisingly cinematic prints. His masterpiece is Mitsukini Defying The Skeleton Spectre (c. 1845), in which the princess-turned-witch Takiyasha summons an enormous skeleton using a scroll, while her servant Mitsukini faces it down. Kuniyoshi's painting looks like a still from some ancient horror movie.

His tastes were perhaps a reflection of his time. The feudal era in Japan was ending, violent power struggles erupted and economic stability eroded. In this era of anxiety about the future, Kuniyoshi painted The Poet Dainagon Tsunenobu Sees An Apparition (c. 1840-42), depicting a story about a poet who hears a poem about the autumn night breeze from a ghost that knocks at his gate. The elongated body of the spectre, along with its red eyes and horrible mouth make it a monster, but the poet is unafraid, protected behind the walls of his house.

The impending political earthquake finally hit in the 1860s, as the 265-year rule of the Tokugawa shogunate came to a violent end and the Meiji era began. Everything changed in Japan, from the Emperor to the price of rice, and the age of *ukiyo*-e was coming to a close. However, there was a twist. In the midst of radical social upheaval, the public's taste in art took a left turn. Much like how the creature features of the nuclear age gave way to violent films about human monsters in 1970s North America, Japanese public taste in the 1860s migrated away from demons, towards the real-life human violence that echoed daily life. A new kind of *ukiyo*-e appeared: the *muzan-e*, or atrocity picture.

Atrocity prints, like other *ukiyo*-e, were based on stories from kabuki and Japanese legend but also focused on more recent history, taking the brutality to new heights. There are no demons or ghosts in *muzan*-e, only humans committing violent acts. *Muzan* has been variously translated as meaning cruelty, atrocity or cold-bloodedness, and that's what these images try to capture. The two *ukiyo*-e artists who set off the movement were Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku, both students under Kuniyoshi, who were already rising stars when they agreed to collaborate on a series of 28 prints that would set a new standard for grotesque subject matter in *ukiyo-e*.

Choosing images from both Japanese legend and famous historical crimes, the two artists produced the series *Eimei Niyuhasshuku*, or Twenty-Eight Scenes of Murder and Verse, which was published in 1866 and shocked both the art world and the public. The pictures feature real and imagined characters, all soaked in blood, with swords and axes swinging wildly. There are decapitations, warriors riddled with arrows, victims' bloody handprints on their attackers' robes, and in the most eye-grabbing scene, a woman bound and hung upside down, drenched in blood after being killed by a samurai.

Just as surprising as the subject matter was its popularity; the series was a smash hit, instantly establishing Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku as strong new voices in the *ukiyo-e* world. However, the creation of the series may have had just as much to do with public demand as it did the twisted impulses of the artists.

"I think all those prints are very commercialized. They made those prints to sell," says Kaoru Kamimura, an *ukiyo-e* dealer based in Toronto. "The publisher, who is always responsible for making the prints, has to know whether this would

Sada Abe (1988) by Hanawa, (top) The Poet Dainagon Tsunenobu Sees An Apparition (c. 1840-42) by Kuniyoshi, and (opposite) Mitsukini Defying The Skeleton Spectre (1845) by Kuniyoshi





"NOVELISTS LIVENED UP THEIR WORK WITH THE SUPERNATURAL, THE FANTASTIC, THE TERRIFYING, THE VIOLENT, EVEN THE VOYEURISTIC AND SADISTIC."

ART HISTORIAN **RICHARD LANE** ON THE EARLY USAGE OF *UKIYO-E* PRINTS IN THE PULPS

sell or not, whether this is profitable or not, so there must have been some kind of demand." Kamimura, along with most Japanese art historians, believes that the appearance of the Twenty-Eight Scenes at that point in Japanese history was cathartic for the public.

"That particular series was made just before the end of the Tokugawa era, and [there were] so many battles all over Japan. It wasn't a very quiet, peaceful time."

Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku's masterpiece was also influenced by kabuki, not in its subject matter but in its theatricality. The artists decided to up the gore factor even beyond the already bloody scenes they'd chosen. "Yoshitoshi and the publisher who was responsible for that series decided to use a particular kind of glue, called *nikawa*, mixed with lead colour [for the blood]," explains Kamimura. "As a result it shines, which makes it even more realistic."

The glue-based blood colouring sits on top of the other layers of colour in the prints, making it leap out at viewers. If *ukiyo*-e were the mass-produced horror entertainment of their day, this technique is a special effect, intended to give the audience an extra thrill. In fact, it led to the subgenre's nickname in English: "Bloody Ukiyo-e"

Over the centuries, the series has haunted several important artists and writers in Japan. Ryunosuke Akutagawa has been described as the father of the Japanese short story, was reportedly obsessed with the series, the tone of which is reflected in his writing. Ryunosuke would complain to friends that he couldn't sleep at night after looking at the prints, at the age of 35 he committed suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills. Junichiro Tanizaki was another major writer fascinated by the Twenty-Eight Scenes, and his thematic interest in the beauty of destruction and the downfall caused by sexual obsession was certainly influenced by it. Writer Edogawa Rampo (*RM#54*), the grandfather of the Japanese *ero-guro* (erotic-grotesque) tradition, also owned a copy of the series. Finally, and most disturbingly, writer Yukio Mishima spent the entire evening looking at the prints the night before he and four other men made a public call for a *coup d'etat* on the Emperor, after which Misbima committed ritual suicide, ending with his beheading.

"There is something about this series...even someone like me sometimes avoids [it]," says Kamimura, referring to the superstitiousness of *ukiyo*-e dealers when it comes to the Twenty-Eight Scenes. "Some people call it eroticism, among those murder scenes and blood scenes, something those famous novelists loved. They found something exciting." The series continues to captivate; Kamimura reports that a complete set of the Twenty-Eight Scenes was auctioned in New York City in 2003 for USD$20,950.

In the end, the influence of the West did spell the demise of *ukiyo*-e in both form and content. Lithography and mechanical printing techniques made woodblock printing obsolete overnight, and a nationwide fascination with Western culture transformed the artistic output of the whole country. Japanese painters explored perspective in new ways and the traditional images of the floating world, as the Buddhists predicted, floated away themselves.

Until 1988. In the '80s, the social landscape of Japan was very different from the unstable era that produced the Twenty-Eight Scenes. The bubble economy was fully inflated, Japan was one of the richest countries on Earth and there seemed to be no end to the prosperity. *Ukiyo-e* was a relic from the past and a new form of mass-produced popular genre art dominated: manga. Two rising stars in the manga world were Kazuichi Hanawa and Suehiro Maruo. Both were known for their dark, ero-guro stories and the unwholesomeness of their comics, and both seemed a little out of step with the general optimism and saturnalia of 1980s Japan. In fact, their work seemed more like a product of the social malaise of 1866 than 1988. It was this pessimistic and offensive attitude that made a small Japanese publisher, Libro-Port, reach out to them with a very strange offer.





The Dream Of The Fisherman's Wife (c. 1820) by Hokusai, and (top) Kappa (1988) by Hanawa.

"I was told they wanted to have a 'Bloody Ukiyo-e' exhibition like Twenty-Eight Scenes of Murder and Verse," remembers Hanawa, in an interview from his home in Okinawa, Japan. "They asked me and Suehiro Maruo to draw fourteen atrocity prints [each] with a modern theme." Hanawa eagerly agreed to the project. Just like Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku, each artist made fourteen shocking images that set a new standard for graphic violence in Japanese art. Unlike their predecessors' work, however, the new series could not have been less in tune with the social climate, and Hanawa knew it.

"In the 1980s, everyone in Japan believed that the value of land would be increasing forever, everybody was so excited," says Hanawa. "Money, money, money, money was everywhere. I don't know why the Bloody Ukiyo-e exhibition came up in such a happy world."

His best guess is that the publisher had so much capital at the time, why not? With the social climate as it was, Hanawa was skeptical about the controversial material's chances for success. He was wrong. The exhibition was so successful that Libro-Port wanted to take it a step further.

"I received a phone call saying that they wanted to make a book of these pictures," he recalls. "They explained that they would add the 28 pictures by Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku. It turned out to be an excellent book."

Bloody Ukiyo-e in 1866 and 1988 was published in a small run and instantly became a highly sought-after collector's item, even more so when Libro-Port went bankrupt a few years later and the book went out of print. The publication contains Yoshitoshi and Yoshiiku's entire series, and then the 28 new *muzan*-e by Hanawa and Maruo, each one accompanied by a descriptive passage in both Japanese and English. Original copies sell for hundreds of dollars on eBay.

Hanawa and Maruo's images are incredibly disturbing, even twenty years after their publication. Maruo's are the more contemporary, including depictions of famous European and Japanese serial killers, the moment of Hitler's suicide and even pop culture figures such as T. Rex's Marc Bolan (firing a submachine gun while dangling from a helicopter's rope ladder!).

Hanawa's images are closer in form to their inspiration, using perspective and colouring in a way that recalls 19th-century techniques. His subject matter is more archaic as well, setting his historical scenes with traditional iconography such as kimonos and swords. ("If I wasn't a manga writer, I wanted to be a blacksmith for Japanese swords or a steam-engine driver," admits Hanawa of his sensibilities.) This outsider mindset drives his images, which unblinkingly observe the horror of what humans are capable of. In the print Kappa, a woman has just given birth to some kind of creature, perhaps half-*kappa* (a mythical creature in Japan said to eat children), and is using a rock to kill it, while it's still attached to the umbilical cord. A full-grown *kappa* – the father? Or just hungry? – watches from behind a tree.

Hanawa was also inspired by real life. For example, Sada Abe is based on the true story of a Japanese woman who strangled her lover to death and then cut off his penis and carried it around with her for three days before surrendering to police. Hanawa takes the *ero-guro* a step further and paints the woman eating one of her lover's testicles with chopsticks. It's not much of a stretch, as the remorseless Sada Abe told the police she tried to make love to the severed penis afterwards and planned to commit suicide by jumping off a cliff while holding onto it.

Hanawa, who still draws manga, describes the *ukiyo*-e project with Maruo as "a flower that bloomed from the Japanese avance born in the money-flooded world of the late '80s." Looking at the history of mass-produced Japanese images and seeing the erotic and grotesque terrain covered by both artists' impulses and the public's taste, careful observers can make out a rich, red field of these bloody flowers stretching far back into the horizon of the country's history.

Thank you to Hiroe St. Louis for serving as translator for the interview with Kazuichi Hanawa.

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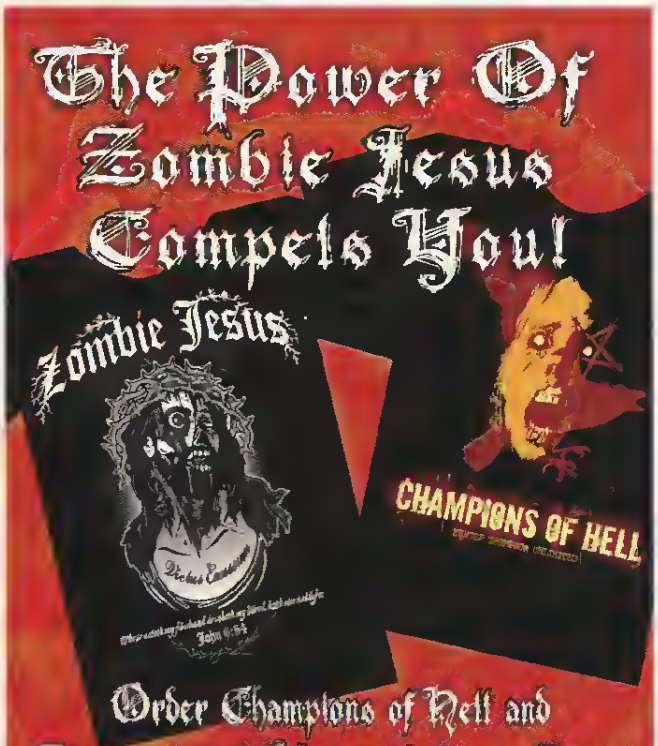
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IN J.T. PETTY'S NEW HORROR-WESTERN HYBRID **THE BURROWERS**, MEN ARE EVIL, MONSTERS ARE HUNGRY AND THE FRONTIER HAS NEVER BEEN MORE FRIGHTENING.

ALL GUTS NO GLORY

BY DAVE ALEXANDER

DESPITE THE ELEGIAC TONE OF MOST WESTERNS, the real Old West was a horror show of isolation, disease, starvation, violence, racism and genocide, yet that just wasn't nasty enough for J.T. Petty, so he added monsters – the kind that sneak up on you at night, paralyze you, bury you alive and then days later feast on your slowly liquefying internal organs. When the writer/director behind the grim indie films *Soft for Digging* and *S&Man* (pronounced "sandman") makes a horror-western, it sure as hell ain't *Jesse James Meets Frankenstein's Daughter*. In fact, his cowboy creeper *The Burrowers* – new on DVD from Lionsgate/Maple – destroys all romantic notions of the frontier with an equal balance of brutal, bloody western and brutal, bloody creature feature.

"The more I read about the Old West the dirtier and more violent, drunken and bigoted it seemed," the affable Petty tells *Rue Morgue* from his home in Brooklyn. "I don't think the white-hatted cowboy hero has been popular in an American western for 40 years, but I was still surprised how nasty the honest-to-god cowboys were. *Son of the Morning Star*, about Custer's campaign leading to his Last Stand, talks about the gallons of whiskey consumed weekly by some soldiers. The rape, torture and murder of Native Americans is well documented and real hard to read. The way I pitched the char-



BEING EATEN ALIVE

SEEMS LIKE IT WOULD PRETTY WELL SUCK.

J.T. PETTY

acters to all the actors in the movie was, 'Anybody who was too violent, stupid, or crazy to make it in New York would get shipped out West because being a cowboy was about the shittiest job you could get.'"

The film takes place in 1879, on the still-wild plains of the Dakota territories. A pioneer family is attacked at night by an unseen force. The next day, Irish immigrant Fergus Coffey (Karl Geary, who was also in Petty's *Mimic: Sentinel*) calls upon them – hoping to see the daughter he's courting – and finds gore, bodies and evidence that some of the victims, including his love, have been abducted. Assuming Indians are to blame, he forms a posse with the John Wayne-like John Clay (veteran character actor Clancy Brown: *Starship Troopers*, HBO's *Carnivàle*), capable cowpoke Will Parcher (William Mapother: the American remake of *The Grudge*, TV's *Lost*) and Dobie (Galen Hutchinson), the son of the woman Will is courting.

The group is aided – if you can call it that – by an army regiment led by Henry Victor (Doug Hutchinson: *The Green Mile*, *Lost*), a cruel tyrant who orders an Indian captive tortured for information. The prisoner tells the white men that "the burrowers" are in league with the devil. Realizing that Henry is a madman barking up the wrong tree, Clay and company continue their search without the army's aid. They're soon joined by the regiment's cook, a former slave named Callaghan (Sean Patrick Thomas: *Cruel Intentions*, *Halloween: Resurrection*), who's also had enough of Henry. Together they ride out in search of the missing homesteaders but find the unimaginable lurking in the soil itself.

Petty cements his reputation as a filmmaker adept at slowly ratcheting up tension as the group of men first discovers strange holes in the grassland, then evidence of a corpse, later a catatonic, paralyzed girl buried in the dirt and eventually the burrowers themselves, which creep to the surface at night to hunt, hidden by the long prairie grass.

"The creatures need the endless grassy plains of the Dakotas," says Petty. "I told Director of Photography Phil Parmet that I wanted the grass in *Burrowers* to feel like the ocean in *Jaws*."

Petty reveals the burrowers in glimpses, using a combination of actors in rubber suits, puppets and some computer animation. He worked with Almost Human – the FX company created by filmmaker Robert Hall (*Laid to Rest*, *RM#88*) – to create the subterranean predators. (A meagre five-minute documentary on the effects is included on *The Burrowers* DVD).

"The monsters have more of a biology than a mythology," he explains. "Me and Rob Hall worked out in pretty good detail where they fit into the ecosystem; a bison predator and good at what it does, but not any kind of alien/Cthulhu minion/vengeful demon. But they've been around as long as rattlesnakes, cougars or … Samoans."

Like many great movie monsters, the burrowers are simply animals without morals or the capacity for reason (the tagline, "Evil Will Surface," is misleading). They feed on humans because by this period in history their chief food supply, the buffalo, has been all but wiped out by the Europeans.

"On a conceptual level, *The Burrowers* has a lot to do with *Alien* and *Jaws*," Petty acknowledges. "I like it when movies don't try to project human frailties onto creatures, when they really respect the cruelty of nature. I'm a big fan of naked mole rats; I like the model of subterranean mammals operating like an insect hive. The method of eating came from spiders and Komodo dragons. Komodo dragons aren't fast enough to take down their prey, but only have to bite their food once to kill it, simply because their mouths are such festering pits of disease; anything they bite will die of infection within a few days. And the whole spider *modus operandi* of paralyzing their victims and leaving them wrapped to rot from the inside out always seemed particularly awful to me."

The Burrowers expands upon fears Petty has explored in his previous features. For example, *Soft for Digging* is about a man who comes across a child being strangled to death in the forest (then buried) and his subsequent investigation of the crime, and *S&Man* is a faux documentary that seems to feature actual snuff footage of a filmmaker stalking, abducting and then murdering women in the woods.

"I think I'm more frightened of being buried alive than dragged off into the woods," muses Petty. "When the creatures show up in *The Descent* I was more relieved than anything else; seems so much less frightening than the claustrophobia of the early bits. Also, the subtext of living burial, the possibility that consciousness could continue after death, seems like it would make every horror story ever told that much more horrible. Also being eaten alive seems like it would pretty well suck."

The untamed prairies of the Dakota Territory in 1879 were the ideal setting for these horrors, not only because

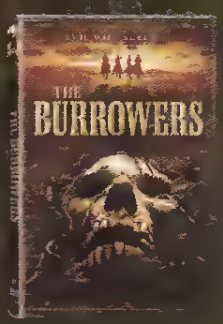
Prairie Prey: *Fergus Coffey (Karl Geary) tries to escape a leg-hold trap as the burrowers approach, and (top) Dobie (Galen Hutchinson) encounters the creatures.*



I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW ANYBODY WOULDN'T BE EXCITED BY COWBOYS & MONSTERS

J.T. PETTY

the area was vast and relatively uncharted, historically it was a time of massive upheaval, when civilization clashed with the frontier. Among the major events of that year was the founding of the town of Tombstone, where the Earps and Doc Holiday shot it out with the Clantons; the inception of the United States Geological Survey, created to study, catalogue and ultimately exploit the country's landscape and resources; The Exodus of 1879, in which there was a massive migration of freed slaves from states along the Mississippi River to Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado, where they went to escape persecution; there was a fire in Deadwood, South Dakota that left 2000 homeless; and The Meeker Massacre saw federal Indian agent Nathan Meeker and ten others killed on a reservation after they tried to force a farming lifestyle upon the nomadic Ute people. In *The Burrowers*, the Ute are one of the tribes blamed for the missing family members.



The film's creatures and search-for-a-girl-kidnapped-by-Indians plot has led to *The Burrowers* being described as a cross between *Tremors* and the iconic 1956 Wayne western *The Searchers*. However, the movie's strong social, political and racial commentary also recalls both the caustic cinema of George A. Romero, and the gritty, self-critical westerns of the 1970s.

"I like *Tremors* a lot, but calling it an influence is like saying *Alien* is an influence on *E.T.*," protests Petty. "*The Searchers* as an influence I'll certainly admit, though only the real broad strokes, the stylistic western influences were coming more from the '70s stuff like *Missouri Breaks*, *Bad Company* or *The Professionals* And you can't not be influenced by Romero, he's the Moses of modern horror who came down from the mountain and told us how we'd be making movies for the next century."

The ending of *The Burrowers* echoes the racially charged, ironic finale of *Night of the Living Dead* It's a cliché and a pun to say there's a lot going on beneath the surface of *The Burrowers*, but it's true. Petty is an artist who seems to be quietly belligerent about carving out a career as a horror director on his own terms. While doing a *Mimic* sequel was clearly the type of hired gun job a rookie filmmaker takes to get established, the rest of his work is thoughtfully confrontational. *Soft for Digging* is a slow-paced, nearly dialogue-free movie, and *S&Man*, which has yet to appear on DVD ("...distributor Magnolia won't release the film for legal reasons," notes Petty) angered some film festival viewers who thought the faux snuff footage was real *The Burrowers* constantly places viewers on shaky narrative ground, as characters set up to be infallible heroes meet shocking ends at unexpected times, and, much like a '70s movie, it moves at a measured pace, running over two hours.

Although Petty is also a video game writer and responsible for creating the story for the blockbuster console title *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell* (something he gets no residuals from), he's not a populist filmmaker. Nor is the horror-western an established subgenre, so it begs the question: how the hell did he get *The Burrowers* made?

"The production got rolling on account of a guy named Peter Block who used to work at Lionsgate [and who recently launched his own company A Bigger Boat] – the same guy who shepherded the *Saw* franchise and greenlit *Midnight Meat Train* and *Repo! The Genetic Opera*. Everybody liked the script, it was largely a question of how to market such a strange hybrid of a movie; basically it came down to us agreeing to make it for a low enough budget."

Petty also has support from FEARnet.com, which is hosting an eighteen-minute *Burrowers* prequel, produced through Larry Fessenden's Glass Eye Pix company, called *Blood Red Earth* (frustratingly, it's unavailable for viewers outside of the US). It explores the burrowers from the natives' perspective, as an Indian man mounts a desperate search to find his child, who has been taken by the creatures, and runs into an enemy tribe along the way.

Although *The Burrowers* is a big-screen film with wide open vistas and fantastic cinematography, Lionsgate/Maple didn't release it theatrically. Granted, studios aren't known for rewarding originality, but the film is also a conundrum to market. Although there have been several supernatural westerns released straight-to-DVD in the last few years – titles such as *The Quick and the Undead*, *Undead or Alive*, *Left for Dead* – they're minor productions, especially compared to Petty's ambitious film. The filmmaker has no illusions about the difficulty of making anti-popcorn movies, but he does see a viable place for horror-westerns (as does Quentin Tarantino, apparently, who's producing a supernatural duster called *Death Keeps Coming*).

"I think the only thing holding it back is a lack of executive imagination and the fact that it hasn't been done before on a large scale," says Petty. "I can't imagine how anybody wouldn't be excited by cowboys and monsters. And the West was already such a violent and morally ambiguous time that it seems like a natural fit for horror."

Genre fans – weary of remakes, rip-offs, sequels and hackneyed trends – complain endlessly about the artless, formulaic nature of most contemporary US horror films, so it's hopeful that a guy like J.T. Petty is bringing some pioneering spirit to the genre. The easy-going filmmaker with a self-deprecating sense of humour might even be an artistic saviour in the often barren landscape of the contemporary American horror film.

In his opinion, though, he's just a guy trying to show you something new.

"All I'm ever trying to do with a horror film is make something that would scare *me*. I think movie-watching audiences are incredibly sophisticated these days, they know the rules of the genre. If you watch a by-the-numbers teen slasher movie, you'll know by minute twenty who lives, who dies, and who the surprise killer is. Watching becomes a cynical exercise in the creativity and grisliness of death scenes. So I'm always trying to twist the genre a little bit out of an audience's expectations, get them back to a point where they can be surprised and frightened by what they're seeing."

Hunters And Hunted: *A burrower surfaces, and (above) the army searches for Indians*



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LIONSGATE RELEASES THE THIRD COLLECTION IN ITS AFTER DARK SERIES... BUT ARE THEY EVEN WORTH WATCHING, NEVER MIND DYING FOR?

8 MORE TO DIE FOR

by STACIE PONDER

AUTOPSY

Adam Gierasch

A car accident leaves a group of Mardi Gras revellers in the middle of nowhere, but not for long a mysterious ambulance arrives to whisk them away to Mercy Hospital, a name that will soon prove to be, like, totally ironic. One by one the kids fall victim to the mad experimentation of the eeeevil Dr Benway (Robert Patrick) and his cronies as they try to... well, frankly none of it makes much sense.

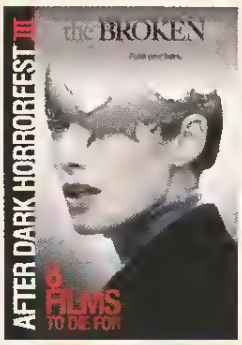


For better or worse, plot takes a back seat to spectacle in *Autopsy*, as writer/director Adam Gierasch attempts to create an absurd Grand Guignol carnival ride (apparently he learned a thing or two about coloured lights during his time co-writing *Mother of Tears* with Dario Argento). As such, it's *almost* successful, gorehounds should be pleased at all the smashed faces, spilled guts and severed limbs. But the film's showpiece effect, the "organ tree," is an apt metaphor for the movie as a whole: pretty, but illogical. Those looking for genuine scares, characters worth caring about or, you know, an actual autopsy will be disappointed.

THE BROKEN

Sean Ellis

The Broken is like a cinematic bimbo. You find yourself all goo-goo at first, but ultimately you realize she's got nothing to say. That said, it does boast an interesting set-up: standing at a phone booth, Gina McVey (Lena Headey) spies herself driving down the road. Curious, she follows the woman to her apartment and enters. Inside she finds a photograph of herself and her father. Fleeing in confusion, she winds up in a head-on collision and awakes in the hospital to find her memories jumbled. Who was the mystery woman? Why is her boyfriend acting so strange? And what's with all the broken mirrors?



As Gina tries to solve the mystery that's become her life, the viewer is sucked into the dreamy world created by director Sean Ellis. It's disappointing, then, when the chills *The Broken* delivers are undone by thinly drawn characters and a lack of explanation for the bizarre happenings. *The Broken* sure is pretty, but it's all style over substance.

BUTTERFLY EFFECT 3: REVELATIONS

Seth Grossman

Sam (Chris Carmack) has a special "way of knowing things that no one else knows." That is, he sits in a bathtub full of ice, hooks himself up to a laptop, and jumps through time. He decides to use his abilities to help find his girlfriend's killer, he also decides to ignore the rule about meddling in the past lest it affect the present, thus Sam repeatedly incriminates himself in a growing number of murders.

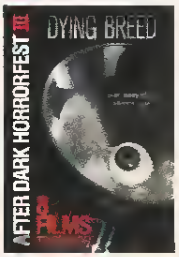


The blood flies a bit, largely because the killer has an inefficient, noisy, messy MO. And there's even a lengthy sex scene that prominently features Miss Horrorfest 2007's tits pressed up against a glass table (FYI: she's the mascot of the After Dark series). However, none of this saves *Revelations* from itself, it's all deadly dull and serious, more tell than show, leading to a positively laughable twist ending. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going to take my computer into the tub and see if I can jump back to the moment before I pressed "play" on this one.

DYING BREED

Jody Dwyer

A group of young folk wanders off the beaten path and runs afoul of murderous inbreds – this formula has been used countless times in horror films (*The Hills Have Eyes*, *Wrong Turn*, etc.). Yet somehow rather than feeling like a tired retread, *Dying Breed* is more like an old sweater; it's overly familiar and perhaps threadbare, but oddly comforting nonetheless.



Said young folk set off into the wilds of Tasmania in search of the long-lost Tasmanian tiger, their quest leads them to the township of Sarah, whose residents are descendants of The Pieman, an infamous cannibal from Australia's days as a penal colony for the British Empire. The landscape here is gorgeous, yet it's captured in a way that belies the bleakness of it – these characters are truly miles from nowhere, and there's something far more dangerous than the legendary tiger waiting for them.

Dying Breed actually breathes a bit of life into Outback horror with its creepy atmosphere, gobs of grue, and nasty streak. There's plenty to see here, even if you've seen it all before.

FROM WITHIN

Phedon Papamichael

If M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* was even less interesting, made for the price of a used car and starred a couple of goth kids, it'd be something like *From Within*.

A goth boy blows his brains out and suddenly the citizens of the small, hyper-religious community of Grovetown are in the midst of a suicide plague. The film is occasionally effective, as ghostly contact lens-wearing doppelgangers cajole their real-world counterparts into offing themselves, whether actively (dragging someone's arms over jagged glass) or passively (tricking someone into drinking bleach), but ultimately it's all too tame to satisfy the hardcore horror crowd.



The intriguing premise, which perhaps finds its roots in Mario Bava's *Kill, Baby... Kill!* or the vengeful curse films of Asian cinema, is squandered as Final Girl Lindsay (Elizabeth Rice) becomes a target and must solve the mystery. Ultimately, the filmmakers reduce the story to a showdown between brooding bad boy Wiccan Aidan (Thomas Dekker) and psychotic preacher's son Dylan (Kelly Blatz) that's got about as many layers as a game of shirts vs. skins.

PERKINS' 14

Craig Singer

Perkins' 14 is, in a sense, historic, as it's one of the first films developed to completion by the community at Massify.com, where members of the site vote on plot ideas, actors, crew – almost all of the elements of a feature film.



*A grisly organ mobile featured in **Autopsy** and (below) a murderous moment from **Dying Breed**.*

The plot, as it is: Deputy Sheriff Dwayne Hopper's son was the last victim in a series of fourteen abductions. Ten years later his family is broken – his wife is having an affair, his daughter has gone all shopping-mall-gothic-sullen on him and he's drinking on the job. Late one night he talks to an inmate and, within minutes, deduces that the man, Ronald Perkins, is behind the disappearance of the children. They're still alive, but Perkins has been pumping them full of PCP for the last decade, somehow turning them into inhumanly strong, shiny-eyed, flesh-eating, raging "zombies."



Not surprisingly, given its mode of production, *Perkins' 14* is a pastiche of "cool horror stuff" and some gore thrown together with little mind for logic. Add a ludicrous plot, unappealing characters and seizure-inducing flickering lights and you have a failed cinematic experiment.

SLAUGHTER

Stewart Hopewell

Faith (Amy Shiels) has moved to a new city after breaking up with her abusive boyfriend. One night at a bar, she meets Lola (Lucy Holt), a country mouse whose philosophy is "have fun while you're young," which equates to sleeping with older men in return for "perks," which, you know, totally doesn't make her a whore. As the girls grow closer, Faith notices that Lola's one-night stands don't just leave in the morning – they disappear. This might have something to do with the noisy, smelly slaughterhouse out back (damn well better have something to do with it given the film's title!).



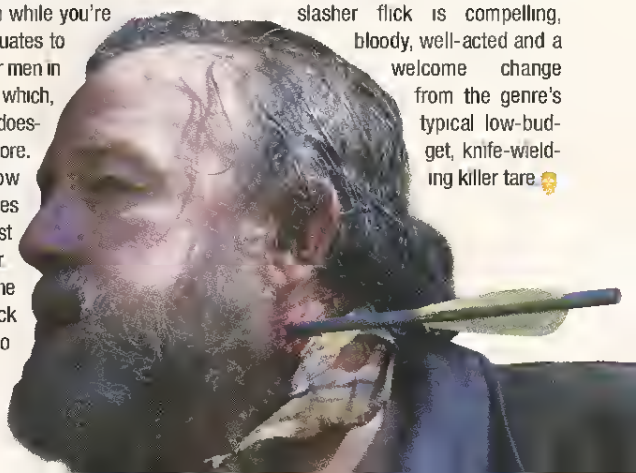
Though the pace is slow, the first hour of *Slaughter* is fairly intriguing as we get to know the girls and Lola's glassy family, all while trying to figure out exactly what's going down in the abattoir. Unfortunately, writer/director Hopewell leads us into the land of pedestrian torture and a seemingly never-ending "Whee, I'm ca-RAZY! I'm-a gunna kill you!" third act that craps all over the little audience interest that remains.

VOICES

Ki-hwan Oh

One of the strongest entries in this year's After Dark series hails from South Korea and, praise be, there's nary a sopping wet, long-haired ghost girl in sight. At a family wedding, schoolgirl Ka-in (Jin-seo Yun) watches as the bride plummets from a balcony. Later, she sees her aunt brutally stabbing the injured woman to death as she lies in her hospital bed. Things go from bad to really effing bad for Ka-in as everyone she knows, family and friends alike, suddenly seem to have a stabby hate-on for her. Petty jealousies turn to murderous impulses and Ka-in soon learns that she can't trust anyone, not even herself. As you might expect, there's a mystery to solve and a curse to confront, and unfortunately *Voices* suffers from plot holes and a few ineffective twists. Still, this supernatural slasher flick is compelling, bloody, well-acted and a welcome change from the genre's typical low-budget, knife-wielding killer fare.





CINEMACHBRE

FILM + DVD + REISSUES



Last House On The Left: *John (Tony Goldwyn) and Emma Collingwood (Monica Potter) discover their brutalized daughter Mari (Sara Paxton)*

RAPE/REVENGE/REMAKE

THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT

Starring Garrett Dillahunt, Aaron Paul and Sara Paxton
Directed by Dennis Iliadis
Written by Adam Alleca, Carl Ellsworth and Wes Craven
Rogue Pictures

Both the original *The Last House on the Left* (1972) and this new remake concern middle-class parents resorting to savagery after their daughter and her friend are raped and brutalized by a group of unwashed psychos. But we knew that already, didn't we? So let's get this original vs. remake brawl underway.



The original – Wes Craven's debut feature – was a barely competent by-the-numbers rape/revenge deal that had much loftier aspirations but was fatally undermined by a mediocre cast, an abysmal script, ill-advised attempts at comic relief and an atrocious score. For all its shocking violence and soul-crushing cynicism, the film ultimately owes its iconic status in the "savage cinema" canon to the fact that both Craven and producer Sean Cunningham subsequently enjoyed hugely successful careers by making much better films.

The remake is a more-or-less competent by-the-numbers rape/revenge deal with a good cast, an unremarkable script and a decent climax that's undermined by a ludicrous and weirdly arbitrary final scene. Violent as this new one may be, certain key incidents from the original have been excised for reasons we can only speculate about, and hardcore genre fans may find it a tad tame (and outdated) when contrasted with the current onslaught of *atrocité-nouveau* heading our way from France.

It's also largely devoid of the original film's underlying message that revenge, no matter how well-earned, often rings hollow, and yet it never completely falls on its ass the way the original did. Its principal failure, in fact, is that it could have righted many more of its predecessor's wrongs than it ultimately did, but taken strictly as a stand-alone effort it's not half bad. If that constitutes damning it with faint praise, then so be it, because frankly, faint praise is all it really deserves. Advantage: remake. Bring on the hate mail.

Allow me to close this out with a note to dear Uncle Wes: Okay, so I'm not a fan of your first film. But I still like *Scream*, I love *A Nightmare on Elm Street* and I really, really love *The Hills Have Eyes*. That's gotta count for something… right?

JOHN W. BOWEN

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

MONSTERS VS ALIENS

Starring Reese Witherspoon, Seth Rogan and Rainn Wilson
Directed by Rob Letterman and Conrad Vernon
Written by Jonathan Aibel, Glenn Berger, Maya Forbes et al.
DreamWorks

Given the decades of critters and otherworldly things of all persuasions battling each other on film, how in the fricken' frack did a movie titled *Monsters vs Aliens* not appear earlier? *Freddy vs Jason*, *Alien vs. Predator*, *Godzilla vs.*. Pretty Much Everything came before this. Even Joe battled the Volcano and Kramer fought Kramer years before DreamWorks paired the obvious. And power to 'em, because as someone who would rather deep-throat a porcupine than watch the average animated kiddie flick, I wholeheartedly endorse this hella-fun riff on classic creature features.



First, we get a spin on *Attack of the 50 ft. Woman* when Susan Murphy (Reece Witherspoon) gets hit by a meteorite on her wedding day. Bursting through the church, she's promptly captured by the military and spirited away to a secret underground

facility (prison, really) that was built to hide "monsters." Here she's given the name "Ginormica" and meets the locals: brilliant, scheming Dr. Cockroach (*House*'s Hugh Laurie), a former researcher who turned himself into 'roach-man via a *Fly*-like experiment; the dumb-as-dough, one-eyed gelatinous lump named Bicarbonate Ostylezene Benzonate or B.D.B. (Seth Rogan), who we see created in a flavour-testing accident (via a *Blob*-like flashback); the Creature From the Black Lagoon-like Missing Link, who pines for his days scaring beachgoers; and the towering caterpillar Insectosaurus, who's clearly inspired by the *Godzilla* movies.

When a four-eyed alien called Gallaxhar (Rainn Wilson) with a giant robot and an army of clones attacks Earth, the monsters are called into action. As the film lives up to its title, San Francisco gets stomped, a spaceship is thrashed, Susan accepts her new life as a giant and we all learn a valuable lesson about being different.

If you caught the film in IMAX 3-D, you win, as the action-packed, colourful visuals are ideal for the format – big monsters call for a big screen, after all. Beyond the eye candy, though, the story gleefully incorporates all kinds of stuff from genre films past (e.g. the president tries to make contact by playing the familiar notes from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*) and the characters are hilarious, particularly B.O.B, who's fond of playing handball with his own eye.

With its weird beasties, high-spirited carnage and eye-popping visuals (literally, in B.O.B's case) *Monster vs Aliens* is the kind of gateway film that gets kids hooked on creature features for life. And it reminds the rest of us why the mere mention of "monster" or "alien" still incites a grin.

DAVE ALEXANDER



***Monsters vs Aliens:** Ginormica fleers the alien robot.*

I IS 'FRAID OF SOME GHOSTS!

THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT

Starring Virginia Madsen, Kyle Gallner and Elias Koteas
Directed by Peter Cornwell
Written by Adam Simon and Tim Metcalfe
Lionsgate

"Why do bad things happen to good people?" This is the question Sara Campbell (Virginia Madsen) asks at the beginning of *The Haunting in Connecticut*. By the conclusion of the film, one is inclined to reply, "Why do bad endings happen to good films?"

Set in 1987, the story is loosely based on the alleged real-life haunting of the Snedeker family. The family in the film version is the Campbells, who move into their Connecticut home so that son Matt (Kyle Gallner) can be closer to the hospital where he receives cancer treatments. However, the steal-of-a-deal homestead is a former funeral home with a macabre history. Little is thought of the house's past until Matt begins seeing, hearing and, in some cases, feeling bizarre and gruesome things. At first it's chalked up to the intensive drug therapy wreaking havoc on his mind, but then he meets a kindly reverend (Elias Koteas) at the hospital who helps him uncover the house's sinister past as the site of séances and necromancy.



The first hour-and-a-half of the film has genuinely goosebump-inducing spookshow scares, fantastic sets (the creepy, creaky house steals the show), great special effects and a solid cast, most notably Gallner. Rather than play Matt as a woe begotten Cancer Boy, he inhabits the role with a startling empathy – a teen rendered wise beyond his years while living in the shadow of the Valley of Death.

But the movie suddenly loses its way in the last fifteen minutes, then scrambles to the finish line with an overwrought, groan-inducing finale right off the Hollywood conveyor belt. It's almost enough to make one forget what the film portrays so well in those first 90 minutes: that anything, houses, families and people especially, can be haunted.

LEA LAWRYNOWICZ

A HOST OF HOSTS

AMERICAN SCARY

Starring Ernie Anderson, John Zacherle and Alan F. Milair
Directed by John E. Hudgens
Written by Sandy Clark
Cinema Libre

They're a pretty unorthodox fraternity, and that doesn't just apply to their wardrobe. Most of them have heard of each other, and yet most still haven't met face-to-face. They command rabid local followings but only a few have any national or international reputation to speak of. Few of them still appear on TV with any regularity, but they remain ubiquitous on the internet and many turn up regularly on the horror convention circuit. For these reasons and more, their fans would likely agree that it's high time TV horror hosts – a uniquely American pop-culture oddity if ever there was one – got a documentary of their own.

The phrase "loving tribute" appears in bold type on the rear box cover of *American Scary*. As cliché as that sounds, it's about as good a description as any for this feature-length fanboy love-in with just about all the usual suspects, from Maila Nurmi (Vampira, *RM#77*) to Ghoulardi to my own childhood fave, Dr. E. Nick Witty (Bowen's Basement, *RM#85*), along with luminaries including Neil Gaiman, Bob Burns, Joe Bob Briggs, Tom Savini and the late great Uncle Forry Ackerman. (Curiously, Elvira appears only in archival footage – according to the filmmakers, she didn't return their calls.)



Director Hudgens and writer Clark wisely avoid horning in with narration, instead weaving their multiple subjects' anecdotes into a rough historical account with smart editing, which is nicely counterbalanced with cool footage from the glory days of horror hosting (1950s to the early 197Ds). Many interviewees openly acknowledge each other as influences, and there's ample discussion of the remarkable concentration of horror hosts in Ohio – Cleveland is clearly the epicentre, although Toledo, Cincinnati, Akron and Columbus are also well represented. Plenty of fun DVD extras are tossed in, including commentary, an extended (and extremely candid) interview with Nurmi and footage from – no shit – a horror host wedding.

Given the burgeoning popularity of genre-related documentaries (and our seemingly insatiable appetite for them), it's safe to assume that the horror host phenomenon would get the treatment sooner or later. Let's just be thankful that Hudgens and Clark got there first.

JOHN W. BOWEN



HELL ON WHEELS

LATE BLOOMER

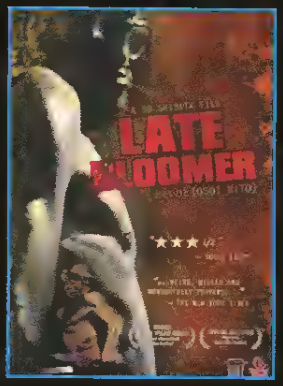
Starring Masakiyo Sumida, Mari Torii and Naozo Horita
Written and directed by Gô Shibata
Sone House Asia

Just when you thought Japanese genre cinema couldn't get any crazier, one of the country's filmmakers brings us a movie about a severely disabled serial killer.

Late Bloomer is centred around Sumida (played by physically impaired actor Masakiyo Sumida), who is confined to a wheelchair and must rely on a portable computer to speak for him.

With extremely limited use of his arms and legs he has a number of care workers attending to him, yet he still manages to spend a lot of time getting drunk, watching porn and taking in rock concerts. But when Sumida suspects that his caregiver Take (Naozo Horita) has plans for a girl who he has fallen in love with, he drugs him and, with great difficulty, manages to drag his body to his bathtub to drown him.

And so it begins. The power Sumida feels at being able to use his twisted body to take a life proves to be so overwhelming that he starts roaming the streets at night in his wheelchair, preying on those who would never suspect they'd have anything to fear from him. This is where the film really works, as both Sumida and director Gô Shibata successfully strip away preconceived notions of the disabled being harmless and relatively helpless.



The viewer becomes increasingly uneasy as Sumida's growing despondency with his broken body reaches a fever pitch of fury and frustration. His killings are uncomfortably prolonged affairs, some of which are punctuated with copious amounts of blood and the killer's pathetic whimpers and wails.

Shibata shot the film in murky black and white, adding stylized pixilation and playing with different camera speeds to give it a hand-held, herky-jerky quality that echoes Sumida's jagged body movements and helps demonstrate the way that he must see the world.

Destined to become an underground cult classic, this is an effectively nasty little film that will be applauded by some and reviled by many more.

LAST CHANCE LANCE

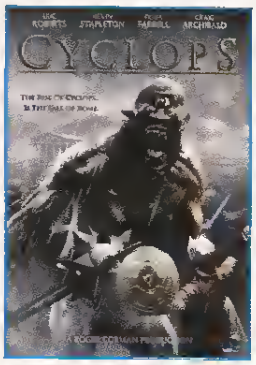
NO PROPS FOR 'CLOPS

CYCLOPS

Starring Eric Roberts, Kevin Stapleton and Frida Farrell
Directed by Declan O'Brien
Written by Frances Ooel
Anchor Bay

Here are some things that you may not have known about the Roman Empire, as learned from the Roger Corman-produced Sci-Fi Channel movie *Cyclops*: The Cyclops was a Roman legend as well as being part of Greek mythology. Rome could get so cold that you could see everyone's breath all the time, even when they were indoors. The Coliseum could seat approximately 150 people. The population of the Roman Empire was about 300, and they all had either American or Australian accents. And, finally, the Cyclops could change size (according to the CGI demands of the scene it's in).

Look, I don't demand historical accuracy from my movies, just historical believability. The first couple of those details I might have been able to swallow, depending on how generous I was feeling, but things quickly spun out of control. However, what *Cyclops* lacks in believability, it makes up for in ridiculousness, resulting in something less than a total write-off.



Gluing together story fragments from *Gladiator* and *Spartacus*, *Cyclops* tells the tale of a centurion sent to capture a Cyclops that's been terronzing the Roman countryside. The 'clops is imprisoned and eventually thrown into the Coliseum to amuse the peasants by killing and eating slaves. This pushes the slaves too far and they plot, along with the now-disgraced centunon, to release the Cyclops and rise up against the Emperor.

This could have been a fairly interesting story if the film wasn't beset by a relentless cheapness. Everything looks fake, right from the opening frame; the Cyclops is a cartoony abomination and "Rome" looks like a set. Fortunately, some of the actors have the good sense to have fun with it. Eric Roberts springboards from his involvement with *The Dark Knight* to lead the cast as the Emperor Tibenus, although it's not clear whether he's amusing himself or if he's really that egotistical. The gore level is relatively high, but again all the blood is CGI and looks faker than fake blood.

I think it's fair to suggest that *Cyclops*, as a film, suffers from a lack of .. vision.

JASON LAPEYRE

AIN'T NO SWAMP THING

SWAMP DEVIL

Starring Bruce Oern, Cindy Sampson and Nicolas Wright
Directed by David Winning
Written by Gary Dauberman and Ethlie Ann Vare
Genius



Just what the world needs – another substandard *Swamp Thing* rip-off. *Swamp Devil* is the latest release in Genius' ongoing Maneater Series – a collection of made-for-Sci-Fi Channel films whose thematic link is bloodthirsty beasties (crocodiles, tigers and, uh, monkeys) killing, maiming and/or generally frightening people in a variety of frustratingly bloodless and boring ways. While their plots may taste distinctly vanilla, who the heck doesn't love a good monster movie? Keyword: Good.

Swamp Devil opens with a young woman named Melanie (Cindy Sampson) receiving a portentous phone call informing her that her estranged father Howard (Bruce Dern) is on his deathbed. With the intention of saying goodbye, Melanie returns to her hometown for the first time in years, only to discover that her old man is alive and well, but wanted for the murder of a local teenage girl. But is Melanie's father really the killer, or was it the mythical swamp devil that is rumoured to torment the town? With the help of an enigmatic (read: blatantly eeeevil) stranger, Melanie vows to get the bottom of the mystery.

By what seems like the 400th tedious, Swamp Devil-less minute, however, nobody really gives a crap who did it. And when the mysterious stranger – big surprise – finally morphs into the cheaply rendered, badly lit, poorly animated titular monster, the film has long since used up it's only value-added feature: the casting of Academy Award-nominated actor Bruce Dern, who takes his place alongside other actors who are diluting their careers doing too many crummy straight-to-DVD movies (think: Lance Henriksen and Michael Madsen).

Monster movie lovers take heed: you might want to put on your hip waders before you think about trudging through this colossally disappointing, foul stench of a movie.

JOHNNIE ALWARO

KEEP TRYIN', JUNG MEN

EPITAPH

Starring Eung-su Kim, Soo-jeong Ye and Mu-song Jeon
Written and directed by Beom-sik Jung and Jung Sik
Danger After Dark

This debut feature from the Jung Brothers certainly doesn't win points for originality, as it plays out like a pastiche of Asian horror's greatest hits from the last decade. Audiences are presented with a creepy long-haired ghost, a child in horrific circumstances, a convoluted multi-personality murder mystery, a sprinkling of historical commentary and some good old-fashioned sexual perversion. The subject matter has all been done before, but it has never really been condensed into a single movie. Unfortunately, the fledgling filmmakers lack the experience and sure hand necessary to combine all of these pieces into a cohesive whole. But, they do have enough talent to craft a handful of immersive horror set pieces that suggest they're ones to watch.



Epitaph weaves three separate stories into a non-linear narrative that makes the strands seem independent until the final scenes. The film starts in 1979 when Dr. Jong Nam discovers a photo album dating back to his days as a medical intern in 1942. The pictures reawaken dark memories from his time there, and set the stage for the film's three segments, which include a young girl who is haunted by the bloody corpses of her parents, a bizarre series of murders and a rather disturbing love story between a young Jong Nam and a fresh cadaver in the mortuary. The tales play reasonably well on their own, but awkwardly dovetail together with a collection of absurd concluding plot twists that only M. Night Shyamalan could embrace.

Despite the script problems, the Jung Brothers prove themselves to be talented visual storytellers. A variety of scenes, such as those involving a child's vision of the mumbling, bloodied corpse of her mother and the mysterious ghost haunting the morgue – prove that the directors have no problem crafting effective suspense sequences and big scares. Unfortunately, the proceedings are just a little too confusing to rank *Epitaph* alongside the best Asian horror films. The Jungs could really make something special if they just focus on crafting a straightforward narrative next time.

PHIL BROWN



Epitaph: *A suspenseful but convoluted entry in the Asian horror canon.*

SØNDERHOLM ALONE

CRAIG

Starring Kim Sønderholm, Trine Stårup and Peter Øttesen
Written and directed by Kim Sønderholm
Brink Microbudget

Craig is a Kim Sønderholm serial-killer movie. Kim Sønderholm wrote and directed it. Kim Sønderholm stars in it. On the back of the DVD it says Kim Sønderholm is "supported by a prime stable of actors," most of whom are models and Z-grade scream queens. Kim Sønderholm likes his actresses naked. And he likes his actors to be Kim Sønderholm.

This Kim Sønderholm intrigued me. What moxie! To get a cameo from Troma's Lloyd Kaufman! And all these naked women! This is no ordinary Sønderholm. I called a friend of mine, a Danish director, thinking he may have closer proximity to the intense heat of Kim Sønderholm, and could at least describe the warmth to me. I learned that Kim Sønderholm is an actor in Copenhagen. Kim Sønderholm has been in more than 70 movies. Kim Sønderholm is infamous for spamming directors with dozens of emails and refusing to take no for an answer. Danish filmmakers have been so blind to Kim Sønderholm's genius that Kim Sønderholm now directs his own movies in order to continue acting. I was pointed to Kim Sønderholm's IMDb biography, which further peels back the perplexing onion that is Kim Sønderholm.



Did you know that Kim Sønderholm has a scar across his solar plexus because of an operation when Kim Sønderholm was only one month old? Or that Kim Sønderholm was admitted to a hospital with blood poisoning (?) that would have killed Kim Sønderholm if he had been admitted JUST ONE DAY LATER?!? And that, after recovering, Kim Sønderholm's acting career started "taking shape for real"? Clearly, this biography was written by a very big Kim Sønderholm fan.

In *Craig*, Kim Sønderholm plays a man named Craig. Craig's family dies in a very tragic computer-



OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED

THIS ISSUE: LANCE SHAKES HIS STAKE

MORE LIKE BARELY WATCHABLE



BARELY LEGAL LESBIAN VAMPIRES

Mill Creek

The lesbian vampire flick is probably my all-time favourite subgenre – go figure. But for every classic (*The Hunger, Daughters of Darkness, Vampyros Lesbos* and nearly anything by Jean Rollin), there are delete bins filled with pieces of shit such as *Barely Legal Lesbian Vampires*. The plot: when Lilith is dumped by her girlfriend, she unwittingly hooks up with Carmilla, a lesbian vampire intent on turning her into her latest plaything. Now, her salvation is to be rescued by (I shit you not) Muffy the Vampire Slayer. Possibly shot on a cellphone, this film is so bad that at times the actors are actually holding their scripts and still have microphones attached to their clothing. I really am a glutton for punishment...

BODY COUNT: 11

LESBIAN VAMPIRE SEX SCENES: 5

BUNCHA BOOBS



NIGHT FANGS

Hart Sharp Video

If the pixilated fangs on the cover of this sucker irritate you, hold on because your disappointment has only begun. *Night Fangs* follows two lesbian art teachers who use the internet to lure unsuspecting men to their house, where they kill them, then bathe in their blood because they think it'll turn them into vampires. Frustrated by the fact that it's not working, they track down the diary of Countess Elizabeth Bathory, only to discover that they were actually supposed to be killing virgin girls – um, duh. Amateurish in every detail, *Night Fangs* suffers from a lame script, lousy camerawork, a subpar soundtrack and scares that consistently fail to deliver. Besides, any lesbian vampire wannabe worth her weight in black corsets should already know the story of Elizabeth Bathory!

BODY COUNT: 14

LESBIAN VAMPIRE SEX SCENES: 2

STOKER FOR STROKERS



LUST FOR DRACULA

Seduction Cinema

If anyone was going to make a genuinely sexy lesbian vampire movie it would be the horndogs at Seduction Cinema, the company responsible for such fine masturbatory material as *Caress of the Vampire* and *The Erotic Rites of Countess Dracula*. This time they turn the Dracula legend on its shapely ass by re-imagining both Dracula and Jonathan Harker as lesbians. Copious sex and blood aside, *Lust for Dracula* is actually pretty scary at times, especially the opening scene in which a sexy young vampire awakens in a bloodsoaked bathroom next to the body of her first kill, or when Mina Harker (über hottie Misty Mundae) slowly goes insane as she's torn between her husband and the lust she feels for Dracula. Not your run-of-the-mill softcore stroke-fest!

BODY COUNT: 5

LESBIAN VAMPIRE SEX SCENES: 10

LAST CHANCE LANCE

generated fire. Craig slowly slips into insanity while going to strip clubs and dating hot Danish models who get naked and have sex with Craig. Then Craig goes off the deep end and starts killing, violently turning the hot Danish models into cold Danish corpses. Craig is in every scene of *Craig*. It's almost as if *Craig*'s director is in love with his lead actor. To the point where he forgets about everything else. Even the audience.

JASON LAPEYRE

THE FURLONG AND THE SHORT OF IT

DARK REEL

Starring Edward Furlong, Lance Henriksen and Tony Todd
Directed by Josh Eisenstadt
Written by Aaron Pope and Josh Eisenstadt
Barnholtz

Self-conscious filmmaking is a difficult beast. Horror directors frequently use it in an attempt to seem above the genre and it rarely works. For every success like *Scream*, there's a failure like *Scream 2* (or even worse, *Scream 3*). Josh Eisenstadt's *Dark Reel* is a movie that desperately wants to be a self-conscious black-comedy classic. He and his crew were probably giggling at their cleverness throughout the production, but they're likely the only ones who feel this way.



The film stars the consistently underwhelming Edward Furlong as a misguided youth named Adam Waltz who wins a cameo role in a crappy pirate movie. While watching the dailies, he notices a ghost in the film and tries to uncover the identity of the phantom (it may or may not involve a clearly psychotic producer played by Lance Henriksen). Simultaneously, a slasher starts stalking the set, leading to a predictably absurd conclusion involving a detective (Tony Todd), who is in the movie purely to fill in a few plot holes.

Director Eisenstadt attempts some bold and stylish filmmaking, but is never able to overcome the obvious financial limitations of the production. The movie is filled with faux film noir sequences and long drawn-out suspense scenes, but sadly, the camera it's shot on is so cheap and the lighting so haphazard that it looks more like a student film assignment.

Substituting cheap gags for genuine insight, *Dark Reel* is a lame attempt to satirize the film industry. One of the major supporting characters is an actor with stinky onion breath (thanks to his new all-onion fad diet) that upsets his leading lady during kissing scenes. That's a bad joke, but one that's made worse by the fact that it's a reoccurring gag and the only defining aspect of the character beyond a British accent.

Unfortunately, with the faces of Furlong and genre favourites Henriksen and Todd on the box, this movie will sell to horror fans hoping for a hidden gem. Don't be fooled; some movies go straight to DVD for good reason.

PHIL BROWN

BLOOD ON A BUDGET

INDIE AND D.I.Y. FILMS REVIEWED

FETUS
morbidvisionfilms.com

Morbid Vision Films head Brian Paulin, who rocked the underground with the ultra-gory low-budget zombie apocalypse film *Bone Sickness (RM#61)*, kicks out the jam in his latest effort, an intimate and experimental gonzo gutfest guaranteed to give the gag reflex of even the most hardened gorehound a vigorous workout.

Paulin, who wrote, directed and handled all of the visual and audio effects, stars as a man so overwhelmed by grief after his wife (Nette Detroy) dies in childbirth that he tries to resurrect her through necromancy, brutally sacrificing the team of doctors who attended her in gruesome satanic rituals. Unfortunately, he raises more than he bargained for.

Fetus cements Paulin's standing as one of the sickest and most uncompromising purveyors of splatter working on the fringes of the genre. While the main attraction may be the gore set pieces – which include an intestinal tract vomiting sequence that would leave Fulci dry-heaving, and more skin-flaying, cranial damage and spurting bodily fluids than seen in the sum total of the recent torture porn trend – there is an emotional undercurrent that will surprise even the most hard-hearted of viewers. *Fetus* is available on a professionally manufactured, extras-laden DVD through Paulin's website. Witness the birth of a monster.

THE GORE-MET



PINK EYE
myspace.com/pinkeyemovie

James Tucker and Joshua Nelson, the filmmaking team behind past low-budget horrors *Eat Your Heart Out* and *Aunt Rose*, return with *Pink Eye*, a film plagued by poor acting, amateurish cinematography and clichéd writing.

Pink Eye unfolds in a mental hospital, where inmates are committing gruesome acts of self-mutilation and behaving violently towards the staff.



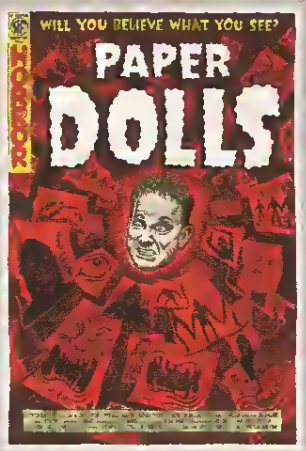
At first it seems that a cruel, sex-crazed intern who is raping the female patients may be the culprit, but it soon becomes apparent that a pharmaceutical company is testing PCP-based drug cocktails on the shut-ins. Doctors are particularly fascinated with the reaction of one patient – who they call "Edgar" because of his penchant for quoting Poe – to the experimental treatment. Though he seems more lucid than the others, his violence is explosive.

That said, *Pink Eye*'s true agenda is breasts. The woman attached to the breasts, Melissa Bacelar, makes her bid to win the Academy Award for "Most Acting" by screaming and crying her way through the film. It's a shame, because there's some solid gore, including what must be the longest scene of a person gouging her own eyes out in film history. But with dumb dialogue and a pandering skin-flick tone, pink eye is preferable to *Pink Eye* – any reason to not watch it.

JASON LAPEYRE

PAPER DOLLS
badfritterfilms.com

Slickly produced and earnestly acted, Montana-shot Sasquatch movie *Paper Dolls* takes its hirsute antagonists awfully seriously. Directors Adam Pitman and David Blair's overly sincere approach ultimately proves to be a liability, rather than a refreshing change, however.



Following a night of partying, recent high school grads Travis (Pitman) and Nate (Nathaniel Peterson) embark on a road trip to Canada. Taking a late-night shortcut on an abandoned road, their car is besieged by barely glimpsed creatures that smash the windows and drag Nate away in a scene that demonstrates the filmmakers' flair for atmosphere and creepy monster attacks. The next day, Travis convinces Nate's brother Chris (Rian Jairell) to search for the creatures, but he's brutally killed too, leaving Travis traumatized and questioning his own sanity.

Paper Dolls deliberately saps a good deal of its own mystery and ambiguity, though, by sketching out an elaborate mythology that traces the Sasquatch's ancestry back to 16th-century Spanish slaves. Ultimately, this forces Pitman and Blair to fall back on a stale gambit that suggests Travis' story could be a big, hairy red herring for his own revenge-motivated murders.

Too bad, because before the plot gets lost, *Paper Dolls* features some tense, technically accomplished moments that surely would have received Bigfoot's stomp of approval.

PAUL CORUPE

REISSUES



Veerana: Behold the Ramsays' blood-drinking snake woman (Jasmin).

SING, DANCE, KILL

VEERANA (1988)

Starring Jasmin, Hemant Birje and Sahila Chaddha
Directed by Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay
Written by J.K. Ahuja and Shyam Ramsay

PURANI HAVELI (1989)

Starring Deepak Parashar, Amita Nangia and Sikandar
Directed by Shyam and Tulsi Ramsay
Written by J.K. Ahuja and Arjun Ramsay
Mondo Macabro

A strong singing voice is just as important as monster survival skills in Mondo Macabro's latest spicy serving of world cult cinema, Bollywood Horror Collection Vol. 2. As with the first volume, released last summer, this double bill of India-shot shockers features the Ramsay Brothers, the prolific filmmakers who pumped India's cinemas full of cheap horror thrills throughout the 1980s.



Those not yet exposed to the Ramsays' work will find no better starting place than *Veerana* (English title: *Vengeance of the Vampire*), a vibrant flick that adds a dash of sex and visual energy to the duo's usual spookshow tricks.

A young woman (the wide-eyed Jasmin) is possessed by the spirit of Nakita, a murdered witch who was resurrected by a sinister cult. Under Nikita's powers, she seduces men then feasts on their blood, sometimes turning into a snake-faced demon in the process.

The film's saturated colours, wide-angle pans and expressive lighting lend considerable atmosphere to sets dressed with cut-rate Halloween decorations. With a bevy of cult-controlled monsters on the loose, *Veerana*'s pleasant mix of Day-Glo camp and classic horror tropes make it one of the duo's finest works. But don't let your fast-forwarding finger get itchy during those song 'n' dance numbers, this film's hilariously inept choreography should not be missed either.

By-the-numbers Bollywood scares follow in *Purani Haveli* (English title: *Vengeance Mansion of Evil*) as a group of young adults spends a weekend at a creepy mansion inhabited by a living iron statue and hairy caveman creature that could be Chewbacca's long lost Mumbai cousin.

Despite an impressive body count, *Purani Haveli* is frequently bogged down by a silly comedic subplot about mistaken identity. That's not to say the film doesn't have its own weird charms, though, such as when the hairy creature does his best Freddy impression and pulls a young girl into her bed mattress. The final showdown is also a highlight, as the protagonists use conventional Christian iconography to fight the beast, rather than the Aum, the sacred Indian symbol that repels monsters in most of the Ramsays' other works.

Despite some fascinating documentary supplements on the first Bollywood Horror Collection, this follow-up includes only a few screens of text that provide context for the featured films. But simply having access to these underrepresented movies is enough to make world horror fans spontaneously burst into song and dance.

PAUL CORUPE

KING OF THE CASTEL

REQUIEM FOR A VAMPIRE (1971)

Starring Marie-Pierre Castel, Mireille O'Argent and Philippe Gaste
Written and directed by Jean Rollin
Redemption

Following *The Rape of the Vampire* (1968) and *The Nude Vampire* (1970), *Requiem for a Vampire* is perhaps one of the more watchable nudie horror efforts by prolific low-budget French director Jean Rollin. Of course, considering the surreal and nonsensical world in which the auteur's films live, I'm not sure that's really saying much.

Two schoolgirls dressed as clowns (including the ridiculously hot Marie-Pierre Castel) are being pursued by – well, we never find out – when their driver is shot and crashes the car. Opting to burn his body and run away, they find themselves in a cemetery. (Don't get wrapped up in logic, this is a Rollin film).



Cue moody gothic atmosphere as they wander off into the woods, only to be attacked by bats, which hypnotize and lure them to some castle ruins. Here they encounter a gang of horny neanderthals, the chained women they regularly rape and some seriously corny looking vampires. As the "story" unfolds we learn that our heroines are virgins, which apparently makes them suitable candidates to join the fang clan and perpetuate the vampire race. Oh, and by the

way, with almost no dialogue, this is basically a silent film.

Requiem for a Vampire is a "take it or leave it" kind of movie. The sets are absolutely gorgeous, the quirky imagery has its charm (check out the vampire bats with a taste for menstrual blood) and there's plenty of tasteful nudity – even the rape scenes are played for eroticism over brutality.

On the other hand, the acting is a joke (a dead guy blinks as gasoline is poured on him), the edits are clunky and Rollin is about as skilled with narrative as a vampire is with a garlic press. So is this movie surreal or just stupid? To be honest, I don't know, but compared to similarly sketchy Eurohorror legends (say, Jess Franco), Rollin shows some class, even if the overall result is dubious.

An improvement over Redemption's previous disc, *Requiem* is presented in anamorphic 16:9 widescreen, looking relatively clear. Seemingly taking its extras from Encore's three-disc PAL set, the main bonus feature is an interview with actress Louise Dhour, a few alternate (clothed) versions of the nude scenes, trailers and a brief stills gallery.

Rollin aficionados will undoubtedly consider this a decent US release, but otherwise *Requiem* will mainly appeal to more open-minded horror fans and Castel oglers.

AARON VON LUPTON



Torben Bille is Olaf, the notorious Sinful Dwarf.

SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

THE SINFUL DWARF (1973)

Starring Clara Keller, Torben Bille and Anne Sparrow
Directed by Vidal Raski
Written by William Mayo
Severin



The opening scene is every parent's worst nightmare. A disabled dwarf comes upon a girl playing hopscotch in the street. She is enthralled by his mechanical toy dog and lured back to his house, where he brains her with his cane and locks her in a hidden attic room with a pair of dirty, naked young women. If ever a neighbourhood needed Block Parents!

The girls are imprisoned in a seedy boarding house run by Lila Lash (Clara Keller), a faded cabaret singer who wiles away her days swilling booze and belting out musical numbers for a drinking buddy. Her diminutive son Olaf (Torben Bille) tends to their captives, keeping them strung out on smack while ushering in men who pay for rough sex.

Newlyweds Peter (Tony Eades), a struggling writer, and his pretty wife Mary (Anne Sparrow), take lodgings in the house. While he tries to find work, she looks after their meagre home and hearth, quickly becoming concerned about the strange noises coming through the walls and the curious parade in and out of the attic. She soon discovers the secret brothel, but before you can say "Jinkies!" she's stripped, stoned and violated by Olaf. Meanwhile, Peter is crestfallen that his wife has seemingly left him and throws himself into a new job at a toy store, only to discover a sinister connection between his employer and Olaf that sends him running to the police.

The Sinful Dwarf is unrelentingly sleazy, due in no small part to the lustfully leering menace of Torben Bille. Bille, who looks like a squashed Jack Black, shamelessly uses his unusual appearance and physical disability to the complete advantage of his character, even appearing naked in a rape scene. Sex is the horror here, frequent full-frontal nudity and protracted softcore scenes are intended to both arouse and repel, making for a skeezily schizophrenic film experience.

Severin trumps last year's region-free release from Dutch label So Demented with a grainy 35mm transfer that perfectly encapsulates the gloriously grubby atmosphere exuded by this obscure curio. Extras are scant but the less time spent being repulsed by *The Sinful Dwarf*, the better.

THE GORE-MET

HELLO, NASTY

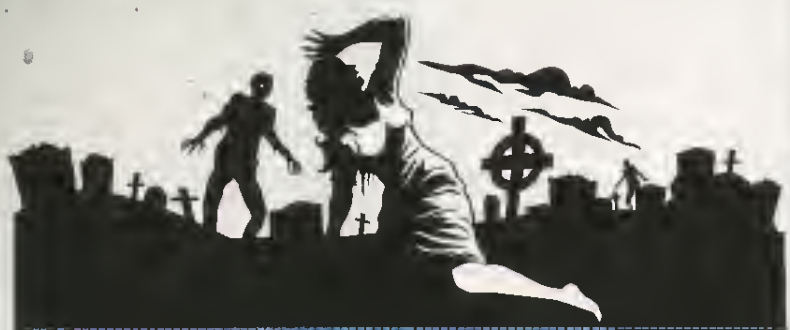
THE CENTERFOLD GIRLS (1974)

Starring Andrew Prine, Tiffany Bolling and Aldo Ray
Directed by John Peyser
Written by Arthur Marks and Bob Peete
Dark Sky

Centred around a moralist who "helps" nude models with a cleansing stroke from his razor, *The Centerfold Girls* is a hotbed of seediness, splaying boobs and blood across the screen with equal gusto. However, it often bypasses suspense to wallow in its own misogynistic cruelty.

That's not to say that *The Centerfold Girls* doesn't have some merit. Presented in a three-act structure that's somewhat akin to Amicus' anthologies, the film has psycho killer Clement Dunne (Andrew Prine) hunt a trio of victims he's selected from a girlie mag. Each victim gets her own 30-minute story, with only the presence of Dunne to thread together the disparate plotlines.

By the time the girls finally catch a glimpse of Dunne's razor they've usually been through the ringer. Take the first victim, Jackie (Jaime Lyn



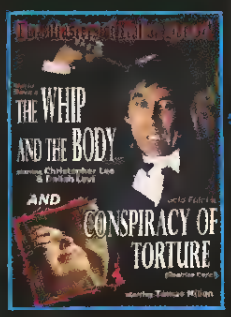
DOUBLE TORTURE TROUBLE

THE WHIP AND THE BODY (1963)

Starring Christopher Lee, Daliah Lavi and Ida Galli
Directed by Mario Bava
Written by Ernesto Gastaldi, Ugo Guerra and Luciano Martino

CONSPIRACY OF TORTURE (1969)

Starring Adrienne Larussa, Tomas Milian and Georges Wilson
Directed by Lucio Fulci
Written by Lucio Fulci and Roberto Gianviti
Midnight Choir



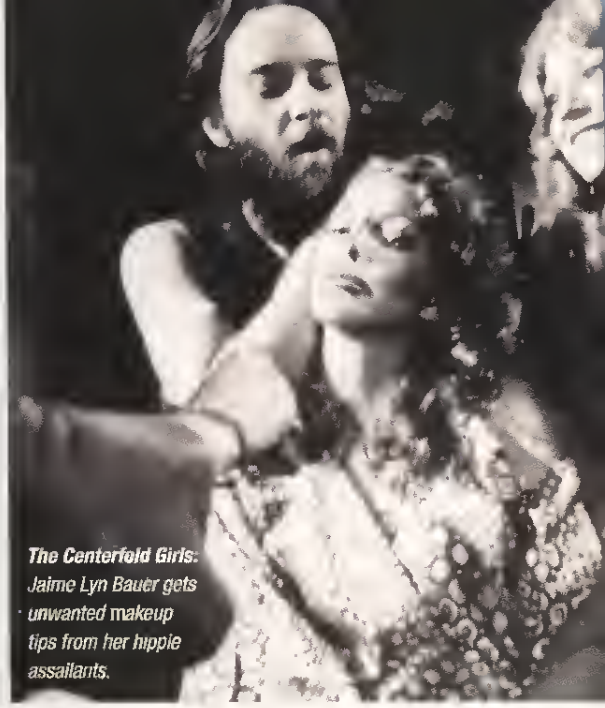
The first release from new imprint Midnight Choir features a double bill of 1960s-produced period pieces from two heavyweights of Italian horror. If you're looking for the definitive version of Bava's Eurotic horror opus, *The Whip and the Body*, you can safely give this one a pass. Despite a stunning transfer, this barebones English language cut pales in comparison to the previous extras-laden VCI release. But don't throw the baby out with the Bava just yet! Of greater interest here is the inclusion of Lucio Fulci's symphony of cruelty, *Conspiracy of Torture* (a.k.a. *Beatrice Cenci*), available on DVD for the first time in North America.

Set in Rome in the late 1500s, it stars Adrienne Larussa (the future wife of Steven Seagal) as Italian folk hero Beatrice Cenci, a woman who became a symbol of defiance for killing her father, the aristocratic Francesco Cenci (Georges Wilson). The story begins at the end, with Beatrice about to be decapitated and quartered in full view of the people of Rome. A series of flashbacks reveals the motive for her patricide: Don Francesco was a monster who routinely humiliated his family and servants and kept Beatrice locked in a cellar, doing things to her that no father ought to do to his daughter. With the help of her servant and lover Olimpo (Tomas Milian), she knocks off the old coot, staging his death to look like an accident. Unfortunately, the plan backfires and they're soon captured. As one would expect from a Fulci flick, much branding with irons, stretching on racks, gouging of eyes and raping of daughters ensues.

In a film dominated by strong performances, Larussa is particularly intense; a classic Italian horror beauty with plump lips, doe-like eyes and impossibly long eyelashes, she conveys a transcendent anguish. The elegant eye of cinematographer Erico Menczer (*Cat o' Nine Tails*) deserves special mention with his heavy use of dynamic, split-focus compositions.

On the downside, a ponderously paced plot ensures that the film never manages to live up to the gripping tragedy of humiliation and redemption that it tries so desperately hard to be. But the intent is astonishing! It doesn't quite stand toe-to-toe with Bava's accompanying sado-masochistic masterpiece but it definitely deserves an invite to the party.

STUART F. ANDREWS



The Centerfold Girls: *Jaime Lyn Bauer gets unwanted makeup tips from her hippie assailants.*

Bauer), who is brutalized by her roommate's friends – unwanted hippie houseguests who wreck the place and attempt to rape her. She escapes this *Last House on the Left* scenario, but her landlord (Aldo Ray) assaults her too, then leaves her to be discovered by Dunne.

The giallo-influenced follow-up has both atmosphere and a high body count as Charly (Jennifer Ashley) joins a few other models at a spooky island mansion for a photo shoot, while Dunne stalks in the shadows.



Tiffany Bolling stars in the final piece as a stewardess who hastily leaves town after Dunne mistakenly kills her friend, assuming it was her. Her car breaks down, but the two Navy cads who offer her a ride are planning to drug and rape her. Unknowingly taking refuge with Dunne, she soon discovers his twisted history.

In the hands of a less competent filmmaker, *The Centerfold Girls* would be almost indefensible, but veteran TV director John Peyser (*Anatomy of a Crime*) pulls the stories together well and enhances the mood with interesting art direction. However, the film's reprehensible attitude towards women, as played out by every sadistic creep Dunne's victims encounter, leaves behind a slightly sour taste.

PAUL CORUPE



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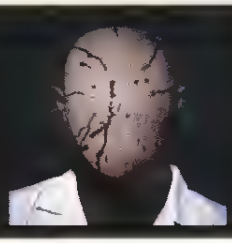
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Better Left Buried

BY MONICA S. [illegible]

SLAUGHTER HIGH (1986)

Starring Caroline Munro, Simon Scuddamore and Kelly Baker
Written and directed by George Dugdale, Mark Ezra and Peter Litten

It's not a crime to be cheesy, but it should be a crime to be cheesy *and* boring – two words that aptly sum up *Slaughter High*.

The high school highjinks kick off on April Fool's Day, when a group of friends pulls a series of mean-spirited pranks on class nerd Marty (Simon Scuddamore), one of which goes wrong, resulting in a chem lab explosion that leaves the boy disfigured. Fast-forward five years: someone has invited the gang back for a mock reunion at the old campus – now vacant and awaiting demolition. Instead of getting the hell out of there, they decide to break in and have a look around. After that smooth move, it's only a matter of time before the murderin' starts.



We never figure out if this is supposed to be scary or funny, but it's neither. And it's only made worse by the fact that the characters are so collectively stupid, they could make a box of hammers look like Nobel Prize winners. If you're hoping for some inventive murders to liven up the proceedings, you'll have to stick it out for a whole hour for a decent kill. Good thing *Slaughter High* (as well as the other titles in The Lost Collection) has a mildly entertaining "trivia" feature that can be turned on to display questions and factoids while viewing the film.

Also – the uber-cliché twist-ending is the equivalent of a cinematic bitch slap to viewers. Yes, a crime indeed.

REPOSSESSED (1990)

Starring Linda Blair, Leslie Nielsen and Anthony Starke
Written and directed by Bob Logan

Made between the first and second *Naked Gun* movies, and using that franchise's star, Leslie Nielsen, *Repossessed* is an obvious attempt to cash in on the actor's then-popularity as a screwball comedy star.

The film plays out as a loose parody sequel to *The Exorcist* – though names have been changed to prevent lawsuits. Linda Blair is Nancy, a woman who was exorcised as a child but is now suffering a demonic-possession relapse. A second exorcism is authorized, but only if it's conducted by a famed televangelist during a nationally broadcast special (read: money-raising telethon). Enter musical montages and the most ludicrous de-devilling ever.

Repossessed is ultimately disappointing, however, because the jokes only work a fraction of time (some of the best ones break the fourth wall to make fun of the film itself). Then again, when the gags come at you in rapid-fire succession, well, something's gotta stick. Ultimately, this should have been much better, a send-up of *The Exorcist* should come loaded with variety of horror-themed humour, but all we get are the same possession and projectile vomit gags *ad nauseum*, and pop-culture references that won't make much sense to anyone born after 1985 (Oliver North jokes, anyone?).



While it's nice that Blair is able to laugh at herself, it'd be much nicer if *Repossessed* actually gave genre fans something to laugh at as well.

MY BEST FRIEND IS A VAMPIRE (1988)

Starring Robert Sean Leonard, Cheryl Pollak and Jane Actherlonie
Directed by Jimmy Huston
Written by Tab Murphy

This film is most famous for its quirky theatrical poster, perhaps that's because it has more in common with monster-fied PG comedies *Teen Wolf* (1986) and *Love Bites* (1993) than with any true-blue horror flicks.

My Best Friend is a Vampire is a blood- and nudity-free coming-of-age story in which no one bites it and only two characters get bitten. Oddly, though, it's still somewhat endearing – but perhaps that's only because I watched those other two loathsome *Lost Collection* films first.



MBFiaV tells the tale of Jeremy Capello (Robert Sean Leonard *House M.D.*), a cute but slightly awkward teenager, who works part-time as a grocery delivery boy. When a sexy female customer puts the moves on him, his best friend convinces him to go for it, but the vixen is a vamp and now so is he. Jeremy must not only adapt to his new state of un-life (as if dating isn't hard enough without the blood lust), but also avoid capture by a pair of bumbling vampire hunters.

The film has a few inspired moments – including his first pig's blood purchase from an "understanding" butcher – and Jeremy's doting parents (Fannie Flagg and Kenneth Kimmins) are pretty damn amusing. Still, this title can really only be recommended to those hungry for some '80s nostalgia, as genre fans will undoubtedly lament *MBFiaV*'s serious lack of bite.



IN THE MID-'60s ITALIAN SCREAM QUEEN BARBARA STEELE FACED A LOAD OF BLACK MAGIC MENACE. THREE OF THOSE ADVENTURES HAVE JUST RESURFACED ON DVD.

BEWITCHING BARBARA

AN ANGEL FOR SATAN (1966)

Starring Barbara Steele, Claudio Gora and Anthony Steffen
Directed by Camillo Mastrocinque
Written by Giuseppe Mangione and Camillo Mastrocinque

THE LONG HAIR OF DEATH (1964)

Starring Barbara Steele, George Ardisson and Halina Zalewska
Directed by Antonio Margheriti
Written by Ernesto Gastaldi, Antonio Margheriti and Bruno Valeri
Midnight Choir



Back in the 1960s, Barbara Steele was the undisputed Queen of Italian Horror. With her large eyes, exotic looks and flowing dark hair, she made a lasting impression in such classics as Mario Bava's *Black Sunday* and Roger Corman's *The Pit and the Pendulum*. Now, with this double bill from Midnight Choir, Steele fans can rejoice once again with two of her more intriguing gothic entries.

Set during the 19th century, *An Angel for Satan* features sculptor Roberto (Anthony Steffen) arriving at an Italian village to restore an ancient statue recently recovered from a nearby lake. Invited at the behest of aristocrat Count Montebruno (Claudio Gora), Roberto soon falls in love with the nobleman's niece, Harriet (Steele), who bears a strong resemblance to the statue. Before long, Harriet begins to act in a cruel and seductive manner, arousing suspicion amongst the locals that she's possessed by the spirit of the evil sorceress who posed for the sculpture centuries earlier.

Well paced and strikingly shot in crisp black and white, *An Angel for Satan* (presented in its original Italian with English subtitles) boasts many beautiful settings. Even better, Steele embraces her character's dark side with zest, unforgettably doling out punishment with a horsewhip in pseudo S&M style.

With *The Long Hair of Death*, Steele reunites with director Antonio Margheriti (credited here under his English pseudonym "Anthony Dawson"), who she previously worked with on the atmospheric 1961 chiller *Castle of Blood*. She plays Helen Karnstein, who, upon hearing her mother Adele has been falsely accused of being a witch, attempts to free her by offering her own body to dirty old Count Humboldt. The act proves worthless, as Adele is burned alive anyway (in a maze constructed of straw!) then Helen is pushed off a cliff to her death. Years later, Helen returns from the grave and, along with her younger sister Elizabeth (who was forced to marry the Count's even more morally bankrupt son), finally avenges her family.

The Long Hair of Death is a lurid, entertaining gem featuring all the familiar Italian gothic trappings: a creepy old castle, skeleton-filled crypts and secret passageways. It also boasts some incredibly atmospheric scenes of plague-ravaged bodies being taken out of houses and the corpse of Steele coming back to life in the graveyard. While admittedly slow-paced in spots, the wonderfully creepy score and above average performances make this one to catch.

JAMES BURRELL

THE SHE-BEAST (1966)

Starring Barbara Steele, Ian Ogilvy and John Karlsen
Written and directed by Michael Reeves
Dark Sky

It's one of horror movies' best quips. When Vincent Price clashed with his young director on the set of *Witchfinder General* he supposedly said, "I've made 100 films; what have you done?" To which Michael Reeves replied, "I've made two good ones."

But is *The She-Beast*, Reeves' first feature, actually any good? Certainly this DVD's great-looking scope transfer and commentary track from Reeves' collaborators will please his fans. Yet, these positives only highlight the fact that this is a mediocre film by a major talent.

Yeah, the visuals, including a sexy Barbara Steele in a vaguely Audrey Hepburnish role, are often breathtaking. Wide shots of the Italian countryside doubling for Transylvania feature plenty of magnificent blue-black skies. Here, characters race through wind-blown fields, and in these passages the movie has the makings of a brilliant, non-narrative tone poem. Unfortunately, though, it's saddled with, er, a story.

Foreshadowing *Witchfinder General*, *She-Beast* has villagers drowning a witch who vows to return. Cut to the mid-'60s as travellers, played by Steele and Ian Ogilvy, happen to pass through her hometown. They check into a hotel, but when the proprietor starts peeping on them they leave... and promptly drive into a lake where the title character is waiting to become incarnate again. If this occult mumbo-jumbo sounds murky, that's because it is, despite the presence of a jaunty ol' "Von Helsing" character to awkwardly supply exposition.



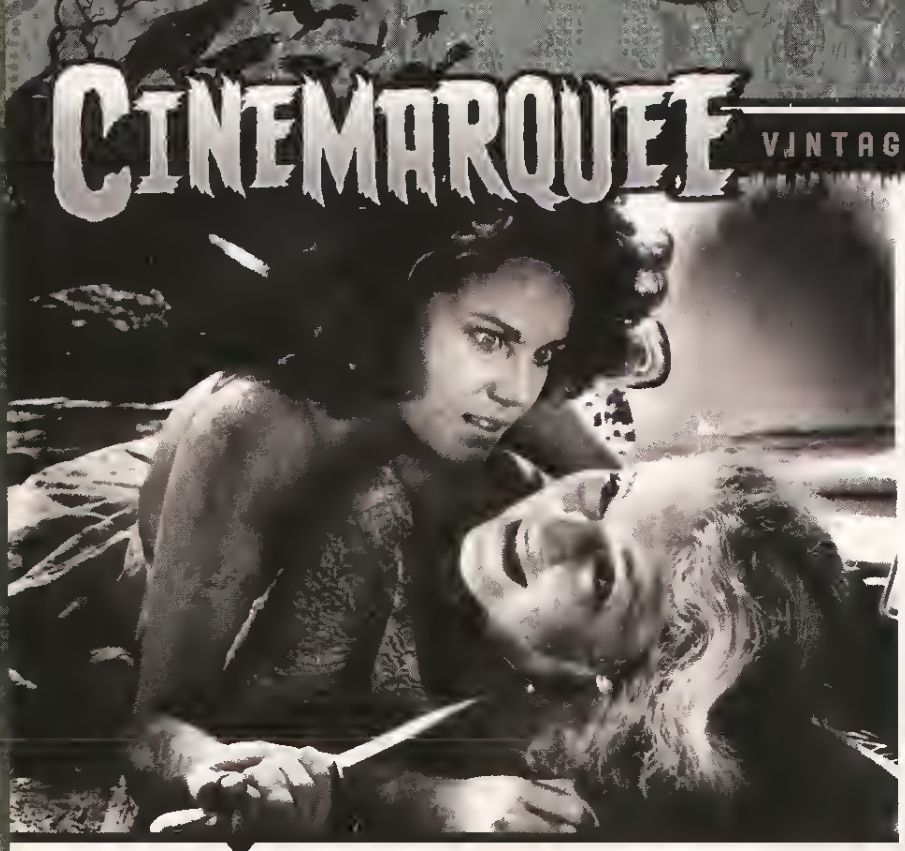
Large and unnervingly spry, the She-Beast kills easily enough, but it's never clear what her objective is. Nor does she seem to rely on magic. Instead, she comes across as an animalistic spree killer more than anything else. Worse still, since the plot revolves around Ogilvy's efforts to revive Steele, the star is absent for most of the film.

Sadly, so are the horror elements. Instead, the story devolves into a nasty-spirited farce as the Romanian authorities and other locals spend their time doing double takes over missing bodies and hunting the monster hunters rather than the monster. In the end, *The She-Beast* is campy without being funny, violent without being thrilling and atmospheric without being creepy.

PETER GUTIERREZ

CINEMARQUEE

VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES



ARCH ENEMY

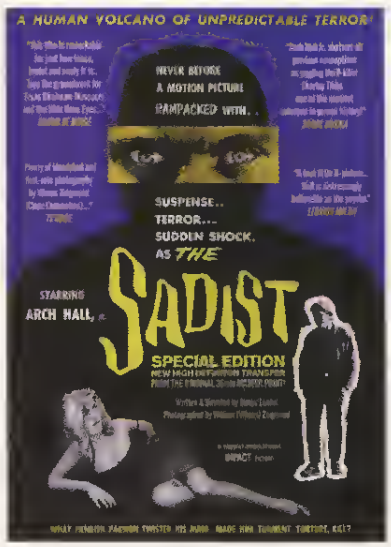
THE SADIST (1963)

Starring Arch Hall Jr. Richard Alden and Helen Hovey
Written and directed by James Landis
Raunchy Tonk

The Sadist is the real deal, an authentic lost classic that deserves at least as much attention from horror and noir fans as *Carnival of Souls* or the original *Cape Fear*. Ignored in North America and outright banned in the UK, it's an ultra-tense, nihilistic serial killer movie wrapped around a uniquely twisted performance. Looking at the film's individual elements, it should have been just another forgettable flop, but these improbable players combined to catch lightning in a bottle.

The Sadist was produced in 1963 by Arch Hall Sr., a B-actor who had turned to producing and financed a string of B-movies under the name Nicholas Merriwether. Most of the films starred his son, Arch Hall Jr., who knew how to play a guitar and who Sr. tried to make into a B-movie Elvis with titles such as *The Chopper* and *Wild Guitar*, which featured his son driving hot rods and busting out rockabilly songs whenever possible. The run of films bottomed out with the awful *Eegah!*, notorious as primo *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* fodder and currently ranked at #77 in IMDb's Bottom 100 Movies.

The year after *Eegah!*, Hall Sr. hired a filmmaker named James Landis to write and direct a no-budget thriller based on real-life spree killer Charles Starkweather and his underage girlfriend. Starkweather went on to become the iconic American serial killer, a teenage rebel who dressed and acted like James Dean and who, with his sixteen-year-old girlfriend Caril Ann Fugate, killed eleven people during a road trip through Wyoming and Nebraska in 1958. Starkweather's story has inspired several movies and songs, from Terrence Malick's *Badlands* to Bruce Springsteen's "Nebraska" to Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers*, but to base a film on the murders just four years after they happened was risky, even for an exploitation movie. On top of that, Hall cast the film with friends and crew members. Two of the lead protagonists had never acted before. The one professional actor was Richard Alden, never known to light up the screen. And most insanely, he cast his son – the blonde, blue-eyed, lightweight rockabilly loverboy – as serial killer Charlie Tibbs. The deck was seemingly stacked against them.



Two of Hall Sr.'s hiring decisions did the most to raise *The Sadist* to the level of greatness. The first was a young cinematographer from Hungary calling himself William Zsigmond, who would later use his real name, Vilmos, and win an Oscar for shooting *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. Zsigmond would also go on to shoot *Deliverance* and *The Deer Hunter*, both are films that take place largely outdoors yet maintain an oppressive, grim atmosphere. His work here anticipates those movies, turning a sun-baked wrecking yard into a bleak wasteland.

The second inspired hiring decision was Hall Jr. himself. The young man had never come close to the kind of darkness required by the performance. Whether Hall Sr. saw it in him or just believed in his son's talent, the gamble worked. Inspired by Richard Widmark's infamous turn as the psychotic Tommy Udo in *Kiss of Death*, he was coached for hours by his father and brought a total commitment to the role. In the end, Hall Jr. injects the movie with one of the craziest, most despicable thrill-killers ever put on film.

Both in form and content, *The Sadist* also prefigures many of the trends currently dominating low-budget horror, including torture porn, real-time narratives, and small ensemble casts trapped in one location. The plot sees three schoolteachers on their way to a baseball game blow a fuel pump and pull into an isolated highway garage for repairs. There they're held prisoner by gunman Charlie Tibbs and his deaf-mute girlfriend Judy (Marilyn Manning). Tibbs orders one of the teachers to fix the car so they can take it, and the next 90 minutes unfold in real time as Tibbs tortures and terrorizes the trio, with twist after nihilistic twist tightening the tension. Tibbs plays with their lives like a cat with a ball of string, and if you don't want to choke him to death after half an hour, you're probably not human.

Hall Sr. produced a handful of other B-movies afterward, none of them remotely in the same league. Hall Jr. acted just twice more, then got his pilot's license and now flies commercial airliners. *The Sadist* remains an inarguable example of the phrase "more than the sum of its parts."

JASON LAPEYRE



IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT

R | DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

GIRL, VIOLATED
by John W. Bowen



The meek shall inherit the dearth. Not a comforting philosophy, but sometimes it's the only one that seems to make sense. Wait – I'm getting ahead of myself here.

Okay, so all this recent *Last House on the Left* remakin' (see review p.36) and reissuin' (see The Gore-Met in *RM#87*) has gone and got me retrospectin' on another film entirely. Granted, there are some striking similarities: my alternate choice is a low-budget early-'70s grindhouse skankfest involving a young girl being kidnapped, raped and brutalized in various fashions by a group of inept criminal scumbags; despite some comical moments and a suitably nasty comeuppance for the baddies, it'll leave you despairing for the human condition and craving a shower.

It's a film loaded with enough bargain-basement moral ambiguity to rattle your philosophical cage, even as you smirk at its bald-faced pandering to the exploitation film crowd. Does all this smack of a certain early effort by Wes Craven? Damn straight it does, and yet on virtually every level, *The Candy Snatchers* (1973) leaves *Last House on the Left* – original and remake alike – in the dust.

The titular Candy (TV actress Susan Sennett, now married to musician Graham Nash) is the angelic sixteen-year-old daughter of a wealthy diamond dealer, and the Snatchers snatch her in hopes of exacting a hefty ransom from her dad. In the process, she's bound, gagged, blindfolded, buried alive, dug up, beaten, terrorized, raped, beaten and terrorized a bit more, then buried alive again. Unbeknownst to Candy's abductors, much of their crime is witnessed by Sean, an abused little boy who lives next door (an impressive performance by director Guerdon Trueblood's son Christopher). But there's a catch: he's mute.

Despite his heroic and ingenious attempts to save Candy, he can't get his sadistic bitch of a mother to follow him to the crime scene. (It's been widely speculated that Sean is supposed to be autistic – the term is never used in the film but much of his behaviour would suggest it.)

Meanwhile, the kidnappers grow increasingly puzzled and frustrated by Candy's greedy, dirtbag father's reluctance to pony up the ransom – a hefty cash windfall in the event of her demise is giving him serious second thoughts – while her boozehound mother floats blithely around in the background on a comfy cloud of dipsomania and denial. Bickering among the three thugs (one of whom appears to be softening toward Candy) continues to spiral out of control, and their scheme grows increasingly complicated and unstable. The kidnappers' shallow, self-serving philosophy – that they've been driven to these extremes by a decadent, materialistic society – rings false, as it was undoubtedly meant to, and yet the other two families (Candy's and Sean's) are equally devoid of redemptive qualities. Both these victims elicit our sympathy in equal measure, and with equal dramatic legitimacy.

In much the same fashion as Tobe Hooper did in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (and as Meir Zarchi did with admittedly less success in *I Spit On Your Grave*), veteran TV director Trueblood (*The Savage Bees, Tarantulas: The Deadly Cargo*) ensures that we identify solely with the victim throughout, rather than inviting us to wallow in her tormentors' sadism. Surprisingly strong performances further bolster the film, and I'll gladly admit I was blindsided by the bizarre yet perfectly credible shock ending.

The cinematography is surprisingly lush for a film of this ilk, and is well represented in its current DVD incarnation, a superb-looking 1.85:1 aspect transfer available from Subversive Cinema, supplemented by interviews and commentary from several cast members. While less overtly gory, *The Candy Snatchers* easily rivals *Last House* in terms of sheer brutality, and the undercurrent of utter hopelessness is even more palpable. And it didn't even need a mawkish cheeze-ballad like *Last House*'s "The Road Leads to Nowhere" to get its point across (Christ on a boogie board, that piece of poo's like a 1972 preview of Staind). As my esteemed colleague (and fellow vintage celluloid skank enthusiast) Paul Corupe once put it, "The relentlessly winding plot brings the film noir nihilism of *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* kicking and screaming into the sleazy '70s, for an unparalleled stab at exploitation glory." Testify, Brother Corupe, testify.

The Candy Snatchers may have come along just a year after *Last House on the Left*, and on the surface looks to have been influenced by it in many aspects, but it's just plain superior. So fuck all y'all purists. Now get the hell out of my basement before I start digging a hole... just about your size.


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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

BY PEDRO CABEZUELO

For many horror writers, childhood experiences play a huge role in how and what they create. This is certainly the case with indie comic *Tales of Rocky Point Park*, written and drawn by Jason Mayoh. The series, now available in trade paperback, uses a real-life abandoned amusement park as a springboard for horror tales which regale readers with facts and wild rumours relating to the park's bizarre history.

"I've always been fascinated by horror films and comic books," confesses Mayoh, "and have been drawing pictures of monsters ever since I was a little kid. My dad actually made me stay home from school one day to watch *Evil Dead 2*. I've always wanted to write my own stories and see them come to life, whether in the form of comic books or films."

Mayoh's story, as it turned out, drew heavily on his experiences growing up in Rhode Island. Most vividly, he recalled the Rocky Point amusement park, which closed in 1995 after being open for more than 150 years.

"Picture a place you visited frequently as a kid with your family and had fond memories of, and then returning more than ten years later to find it had turned into a sort of surreal, horrific landscape. It really inspired me to try to memorialize the place in my own way," he explains.



Adding to Mayoh's nostalgia were a number of urban legends that had crawled out of the park over the years. "I had always heard weird stories about the park growing up. After I started researching its history, I was amazed at how many of these urban legends were actually true – the numerous accidents, bizarre fires and strange occurrences all became crucial to the series. Plus, I learned that many old employees had believed the park to be cursed."

Some of the spookier tales include killer monkey ghosts, fatal ride accidents and a rampaging Viking statue. Add to these Mayoh's own love for the genre, and *Rocky Point* quickly evolved into a modern horror anthology.

"I've always been inspired by the classic EC books such as *Tales from the Crypt* and *Vault of Horror*," he says. "I used to try to copy the Bernie Wrightson *Creepshow* adaptation growing up. It's those types of comics in particular that I was intrigued by – the imaginative vignette stories could go anywhere, plus the art was, of course, amazing."



Tales From Rocky Point Park: *A rampaging Viking statue is just one of the horrors lurking in this former amusement park*

Rather than try to sell the idea to an established comic company – a process that could take years – Mayoh took matters into his own hands. He approached a friend who owns a comic book shop in Rhode Island called The Time Capsule and was able to get help funding the project. He published the black and white comic on his own, under the banner Undead Press. He saw it as the best way to release something with such a localized appeal.

Ultimately, *Tales of Rocky Point Park* proved to be popular in the area. He sold out of the first run of 5000 copies in Rhode Island, which led to a second printing and it becoming a three-issue series.

"I wasn't sure how the locals would react to me turning Rocky Point's history into a horror story," he admits, "but people around here have loved it. Just goes to show, New Englanders love their horror lore!"

The three issues that make up the trade are intended as a stand-alone collection, and while Mayoh says that he might create more *Rocky Point* comics in the future, for now he's working on other horror-related projects. However, he admits that he does feel the pull of Rocky Point Park drawing him back into its world.

"Many people around here have had a strong reaction to the 'evidence' section in the comics, and, in actuality, there were several accident films in existence which have honestly made me want to do a sort of *Blair Witch*-style documentary on the curse of Rocky Point Park."

For more information on the series visit talesofrockypointpark.com.

QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY PEDRO CABEZUELO



Cal McDonald is back in *Criminal Macabre: Cellblock 666*, just in time to get his smart ass thrown in jail after being set up by what appears to be the ghoul community. In the third installment of this four-issue series, McDonald cools his heels in solitary confinement while his ghoulish partner Mo'Lock tries to unravel the secret of the occult conspiracy. Was it really the ghouls? Could it be vampires? Or some other sinister force? This issue picks up the pace somewhat and sets things up intriguingly for next issue's conclusion. Overall, this series is a nice change from previous McDonald adventures, primarily due to its strong focus on the enigmatic and loyal Mo'Lock. Am I the only one who finds this ghoul a much more interesting character than Cal? How about it, Niles? Surely he deserves at least a one-shot spinoff?

This edition collects the first five issues of the new *House of Mystery* series, comprising the first story arc, "Room & Boredom." The creators wisely forego the classic anthology format for an ongoing narrative with a roster of terrific recurring characters, including a bitter waitress, a feisty female pirate, a poet and a bartender. In this introductory tale, Fig, a young female architect, finds herself in the eponymous house, unable to escape from its nightmarish landscape and surreal inhabitants. Fans of the old *HoM* need not fret: each issue also includes a self-contained story in the style of the classic series effortlessly woven into the main tale. Plus there's a great cameo in the first issue by former hosts Cain and Abel, nicely tying the two series together, although one suspects a lot more is yet to be revealed. But hey, it is called *House of friggin' Mystery* after all.





Continuing the current trend of comics based on horror novel series, this original story (now available in trade paperback) serves as a prequel to Laurell K. Hamilton's first Anita Blake novel, *Guilty Pleasures*. In *Anita Blake, Vampire Hunter: The First Death*, Blake must stop a vampire serial killer with a penchant for murdering and mutilating young boys. Along the way we meet characters that will play a larger role in the series. I am not a fan of prequels; I find they're limited by the events in the main work and offer little more than unnecessary background information. This story does little to change my mind. Not that it's bad, but it feels like a quick cash-in. If you want to experience the genuine charm of the Blake series, pick up a novel or one of its comic adaptations. This edition also includes the "Guilty Pleasures Handbook," an illustrated who's who to the first book.

Zombie Tales continues to put a fresh spin on the undead subgenre by approaching the subject matter from different, mostly tongue-in-cheek, angles. "Crime Scene Reanimation" (Eric Heisserer and Jeremy Rock) cleverly sees the zombie virus given to a victim in a recent school shooting in order to determine the events of the crime; "Finish Line" (Ralph Soll and Sebastian Piriz) offers a glimpse into backwoods gambling, zombie style; and "The Mixed-Up Zombies Who Started Living And Became Incredibly Strange Creatures" (Ian Brill and Toby Cypress) shows us how difficult it is for some shamblers to integrate back into human society. All three stories are highly entertaining and well executed (although the last tale leaves you wanting for a more clever punchline after raising the bar with such a great title), adding another satisfying chapter to this excellent series.



This issue of Solomon Kane concludes the five-part "Castle of the Devil" storyline, Dark Horse's first tale featuring Robert E. Howard's evil-fighting 17th-century puritan. Having dispatched a werewolf in the previous chapter, Kane finally comes face to face with the forces responsible for all the murders in the neighbouring village: demonic creatures that could best be described as a bizarre cross between giant insects and angels. Rotting angels. The story moves at a quick pace and Guevara's art suits the grotesque surroundings and does a good job of capturing Kane's sombre and gloomy persona. I can't say that I warmed up to Kane by the end of the story, but something tells me that's a big part of the character's appeal.





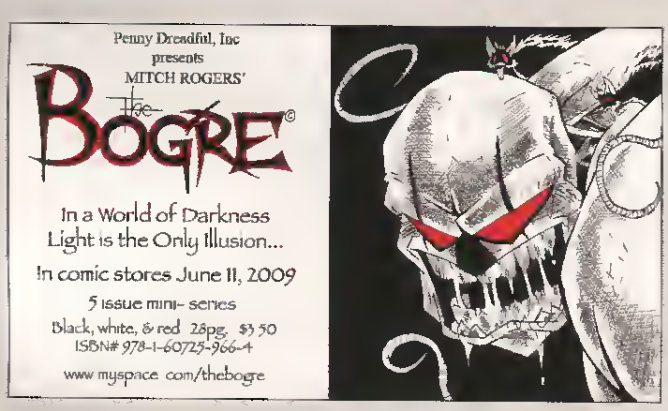


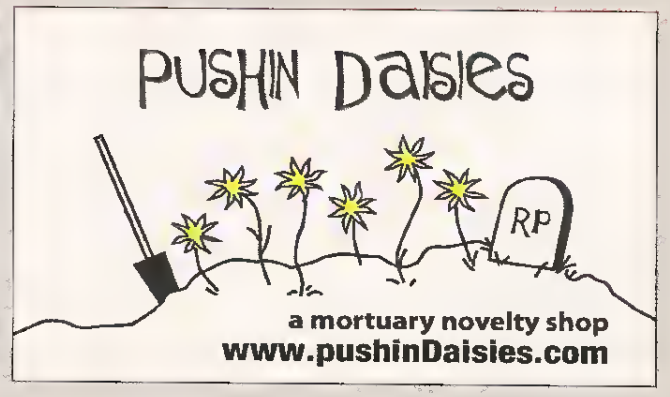


SALES *from the* CRYPT





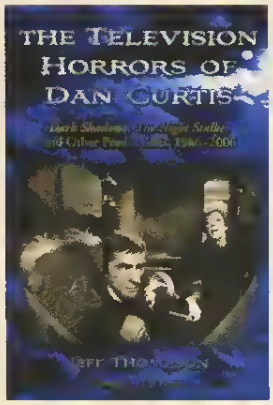




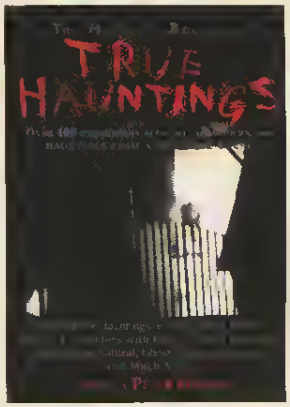




THE NINTH CIRCLE BOOKS







DC TV ☠ LO-FI HORROR HOW-TO ☠ SPECTRAL SPECULATION

THE TELEVISION HORRORS OF DAN CURTIS

Jeff Thompson
McFarland

If you were a kid growing up during the 1970s, chances are you saw one or two (if not more) of Dan Curtis' made-for-television horror films. A master of the genre, the award-winning director, producer and writer (who passed away in 2006 at age 78) was the driving force behind some of the most inventive, nightmare-inducing shockers to ever grace the small screen.

The man responsible for introducing a sympathetic 175-year-old vampire named Barnabas Collins to daytime audiences in the 1960s gothic soap opera *Dark Shadows* also gave us movies of the week about a former newspaper reporter named Carl Kolchak, who finds himself on the trail of a vampire in modern-day Las Vegas (1972's *The Night Stalker)* and later, pitted against an ageless killer (1973's *The Night Strangler*). Curtis' run of genre gems continued in 1975 when he unleashed a savage, murderous wooden doll on a terrified Karen Black in the anthology *Trilogy of Terror*.

In *The Television Horrors of Dan Curtis*, author Jeff Thompson provides a thorough examination of the filmmaker's sixteen horror, suspense and fantasy-oriented television and feature film projects and the impact they've had, not only on audiences, but on the landscape of 1960s and '70s North American pop culture. Thompson explains how Curtis, in working with talented, visionary writers such as Richard Matheson and William F. Nolan, and unique character actors including Jack Palance and Darren McGavin was able to craft productions that stand the test of time.

But Thompson goes beyond intimate insight into Curtis' horror output, he also touches on the filmmaker's most personal projects, including the Emmy-winning miniseries *The Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, which dealt with the real-life horrors of World War II. Additionally, the book boasts dozens of rare production stills, behind-the-scenes images and candid convention photos.

Although well-written and researched, certain pieces of information are repeated several times. Still, that's a minor flaw in an otherwise solid release. Simply put, *The Television Horrors of Dan Curtis* is both a celebration of Curtis' macabre output and a fascinating study of one of television's most prolific and talented auteurs.

JAMES BURRELL

CHEAP SCARES!

Gregory Lamberson
McFarland

Does anyone even know what "low-budget film" means anymore? Paul Thomas Anderson refers to his $15 million budget for *Boogie Nights* (1997) as low, and for an epic period piece with top-flight production values, few would argue that's a pretty paltry sum. Two years later, *The Blair Witch Project* – which cost $60,000 – unseated *Halloween* as the most profitable indie film ever, grossing $29 million domestically on its opening weekend. Lo-fi filmmaker Eric Stanze once told me that his budget for *Scrapbook* (voted Best Indie Film in the 2001 *Rue Morgue* readers' poll) cost him "$3000 in cash and about $50,000 in favours" that he was owed by various St. Louis film industry folk. So let's face it: the term "low-budget" is pretty damn elastic.

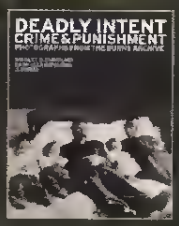
Still, there can be no disputing upstate New York filmmaker Gregory Lamberson's poverty-row credentials. The writer/director of *Slime City* (1988) and *Naked Fear* (1999) also counts Assistant Director on Frank Henenlotter's magnificent *Brain Damage* among his credits, and clearly knows a thing or ten about low-budget horror.

He lays it all on the line in his new book *Cheap Scares*, which combines valuable step-by-step production lessons with his own anecdotes and interviews with an array of B- to Z-movie stalwarts. Director/producer J.R. Bookwalter (*The Dead Next Door*) is hardly a household name but he's practically royalty in lo-fi horror circles; Roy Frumkes and Larry Fessenden weigh in with tales (cautionary and otherwise) from the trenches, and entertainment lawyer Jerry Gold serves up some valuable (if basic) legal tips for aspiring camcorder Coppolas. The impressive list of interviewees doesn't end there either (e.g. Stephen Biro of Unearthed Films, *Shock-O-Rama* writer-director Brett Piper), but top honours must go to Lamberson himself, who proves to be a most engaging writer.

Lloyd Kaufman would undoubtedly be impressed, if maybe a tad distressed that his own indie film how-to tomes are finally getting a bit of competition. But, there's plenty of room in this particular niche market, and as both an advo-

THE GRIM READER

DEADLY INTENT CRIME & PUNISHMENT



Stanley B. Burns, MD, Sara Cleary-Burns and J. Burns
powerHouse Books

People are a savage, fragile and creative lot, as this latest Burns Archive release proves. Following Dr Burns' previous books on death photography and medical abnormalities, the gorgeously designed *Crime & Punishment* offers gruesome yet often beautiful historical photos of crime scenes and public executions. The images and accompanying descriptions are shocking, informative and ultimately meditative on the harrowing abyss that is human nature.

DAVE ALEXANDER

STAGES OF UNDRESS



Steven Deighan
Dark Monster Publications

This new four-story offering from 25-year-old Scottish author Steven Deighan may be predictable, but it also exposes his fiendish potential. The tales in *Stages of Undress* are undeniably disturbing and tense, but tend to be sabotaged by Deighan's unsophisticated literary voice. "Cappuccino Stains," which sees a middle-aged stalker lured into a meeting with the Devil in a Starbucks, is the strongest entry in an otherwise tepid collection.

JESSA SOBCZUK

THE GOLEM



Edward Lee
Leisure

Despite its menagerie of rape, murder and dismemberment – not always in that order – *The Golem* is tamer than much of Edward Lee's notorious output. The novel, which shifts between 1880 and present day, concerns a drug trafficking ring, a historical massacre and a corrupt Jewish sect, practicing the black magic-like Kischuph. Though it suffers somewhat from a lack of likeable characters, *The Golem* still manages to deliver a refreshing non-typical take on religious horror.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

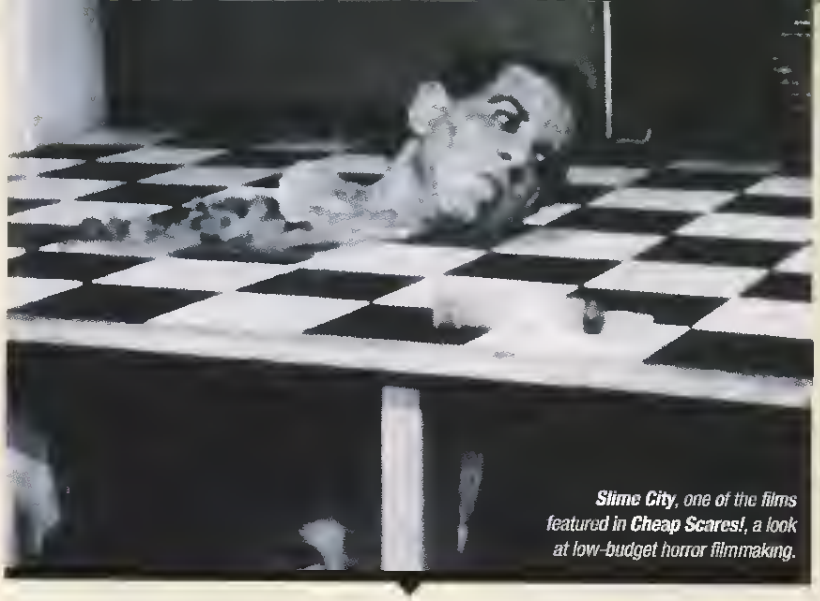
GARBAGE MAN



Joseph D'Lacey
Bloody Books

From the author of *Meat* comes this oleaginous treat about a bubbling landfill, ready to spew forth a garbage-eating monster and its legion of grubby minions. Sounds like, ahem, rubbish, but the artful narrative and lovable characters makes this read gripping, addictive and by no means... trashy.

JESSA SOBCZUK



***Slime City**, one of the films featured in **Cheap Scares!**, a look at low-budget horror filmmaking.*

cate of independent film and a potential mentor for those daring enough to follow in his footsteps, Lamberson truly deserves to be heard.

JOHN W. BOWEN

THE MAMMOTH BOOK OF TRUE HAUNTINGS

Peter Haining, ed.
Running Press

Ever wondered why ghosts don't appear naked? Well, if you're looking for a reference tome that deals with everything from spectral aircraft to ghostly sexual assaults, *The Mammoth Book of True Hauntings* – clocking in at more than 500 pages – has it all. Just don't expect a real page-turner.

The book begins with a century's worth of newspaper clippings featuring spooky goings-on, then segues into a section called Fifty Authentic Supernatural Experiences, which includes a lineup of alleged hauntees that's practically a who's who of early ghost-hunting, from the Society for Psychical Research founder Eleanor Sidgwick through Arthur Conan-Doyle to famed "psychic researcher" Harry Price. Other chapters cover true ghost stories written by famous authors, and phantasms connected (sometimes cursorily) with show business. The weakest section of the book is the one that deals with eyewitness accounts by journalists; there's a lot of detail here on the faking and non-faking of spirit photographs in the early days of photography, which is probably interesting if you're a stickler for technical details but is a helluva slog if you're not. Furthermore, none of the discussed photos are included so that you can make up your own mind about their authenticity.

Despite the eclectic focus, Haining's book gives the impression of being fairly comprehensive. However, the stories are pretty Eurocentric, and in a collection which takes pains to emphasize that ghosts are reported in every culture in the world, this seems like a glaring oversight. Also notably absent is any mention of the plethora of ghost-hunting TV shows that have sprung up in the first decade of the 21st century; although the book was published in 2008, there's no coverage of the investigative teams that use contemporary technology in their hunts. As such, *True Hauntings* feels dated in places, especially since its collection of "expert" opinions dates way back to the early 20th century. When viewed against more recent, science-focused books on the paranormal (such as those by Mary Roach and Will Storr), the theories put forward here seem quaint at best and loopy at worst, making it an interesting tome to dip into – but in small doses.

JUSTINE WARWICK

HORROR LIBRARY VOLUME 3

R.J. Cavender, ed.
Cutting Block Press

Focusing primarily on the vilest human needs and deeds, R.J. Cavender assembles 30 new short stories for this third installment of the *Horror Library* anthology series. Avoiding as many genre clichés as possible, this assemblage steers clear of your more straightforward, supernatural monsters and apocalyptic tales. Instead, the slant here is towards the sorts of

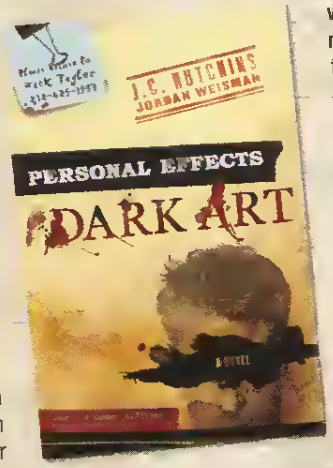
Personal Effects: Dark Art immerses readers in a grisly serial killer mystery that spills right off the page.

LIVE the CRIME

by Brad Abraham

Calling all armchair detectives! The new high-concept horror novel *Personal Effects: Dark Art* invites you to become a part of the story by investigating a string of gory serial murders right alongside the book's protagonist. In what is being dubbed by the publisher as a "trans media experience," the novel's plot incorporates actual websites, photographs, blogs, message boards and phone numbers that readers can use to more fully immerse themselves in the narrative.

"The novel is [also] designed to stand alone," says author J.C. Hutchins. "You can read it and hopefully enjoy it on its own terms, cover to cover, and call it a day. But aren't you going to be just a little curious when you see a phone number or a website mentioned? Are you not going to want to find out more? Are you not going to punch in that URL or dial that number and see if maybe there's something there, something more? You don't have to, but you will be rewarded; you will receive something from the experience."



The project, which is a collaboration between Hutchins, game designer Jordan Weisman (who crafted the multimedia component of Nine Inch Nail's *Year Zero*) and publisher St. Martin's Press, was designed to be an interactive experience right from the get-go. It follows other recent immersive efforts launched in conjunction with popular television series, video games and movies (*Watchmen*, for example, saw a series of mock historical newscasts released in advance of the film). For the *Personal Effects* team, bringing the concept to literature seemed the next logical step.

The novel (in stores June 9) begins deep in the bowels of Long Island's Brinkvale Psychiatric Institute, where alleged serial killer Martin Grace awaits trial. His body count includes an up-and-coming hip-hop star who was ripped limb from limb *then* raped, Grace's own wife and daughter, burned alive, his surviving son's girlfriend, decapitated; as well as untold others victimized during his decades of journeying across the country as a veritable travelling salesman of death. But there's a twist. Grace is blind and claims to have only foreseen these murders, which were actually committed by an entity he calls "The Dark Man." Now, art therapist Zack Taylor has been tasked with determining if Grace is telling the truth, and if not, if he is fit to stand trial.

"Thematically, it's about Zack, this guy who's investigating Martin Grace from a position of science and reason, and then discovers that science is doing a poor job of explaining just what is happening," explains Hutchins. "I wanted to approach the story from a different angle; what if there was a strong possibility that the incarcerated serial killer wasn't a serial killer, but, for some mysterious reason didn't want to clear his name. In the novel, patient Martin Grace is suspected in a dozen killings – and while he claims he didn't murder these people, he says he's somehow supernaturally 'responsible' for these deaths and doesn't seem to mind standing trial. He even has airtight alibis. What strange reason would motivate him to sabotage his trial and his life? That's what distresses Zack the most."

While Zack uses Martin Grace's personal effects, including mutilated family photos and the suspect's chilling artwork, as well as other more official documentation to unravel the truth behind the murders, readers can use the same materials to conduct their own investigations (and in some instances uncover things that even Zack doesn't dig up). Those who choose to delve into this additional content will discover everything from ID cards, crime reports and psychological profiles to gritty newspaper articles, which help make the experience chillingly immersive. Furthermore, these elements have been designed to keep readers questioning the story's veracity, and if what they're finding outside of it isn't somehow "real" by virtue of the fact it exists.

Admittedly, it sounds like an awful lot of work for the reader, but Hutchins is hopeful; he sees *Personal Effects* as a chance to rewrite the book on how multimedia is experienced.

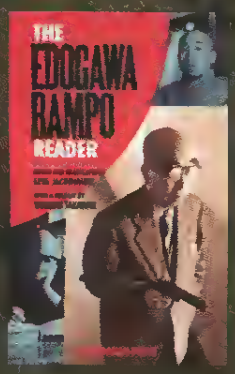
"As a writer, but also a reader, I personally love that there can be more to the story than just what you read," he notes. "It's a unique way to tell a story, it forces the reader to become more involved, which is always a good thing. The only limit lies in how deep into the story you're brave enough and willing enough to go."

THE EDOGAWA RAMPO READER

Edogawa Rampo
Kurodahan Press

Japan-based publisher Kurodahan Press is getting serious about bringing the works of Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965) to English-speaking readers. After a first volume that combined the kitschy crime caper *Black Lizard* and the S/M-themed *Beast in the Shadows* (recently brought to the screen by Barbet Schroeder as *Inju*), *The Edogawa Rampo Reader* is a new anthology that effectively illustrates why Rampo is one of the most important names in Japanese horror and mystery fiction.

The stories and essays collected within do full justice to the author's reputation as a master of the erotic grotesque (ero-guro) and form an ideal starting point for anyone curious about that strand of Japanese horror. The fiction includes "The Stalker in the Attic," a quintessential Rampo tale of voyeurism and murder that formed the blueprint for *Beast in the Shadows* and has been filmed multiple times. Other stories range from surreal ("The Daydream") and oneiric ("Martian Canals," adapted as part of the recent omnibus movie *Rampo Noir*) to spooky ("Dr. Mera's Mysterious Crimes") and downright cruel ("The Appearance of Osei," "The Dancing Dwarf"). Special mention goes to "The Air Raid Shelter," which departs from the real-life horror of the firebombings of Tokyo by US planes in 1945, then takes a turn into erotic territory, with a final twist borrowed from Poe's "The Spectacles."



Of the ten essays included, four stem from the wealth of Rampo's writings on the history and finer mechanics of detective fiction. The most interesting is "Dickens vs. Poe," which deals with the influence of the former's novel *Barnaby Rudge* on everything from "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" to "The Raven." It also details a meeting between the two giants in Philadelphia that came about after Poe sent his English colleague a review he wrote of *Rudge*. The other six non-fiction pieces read more like mini-memoirs than essays, as Rampo gleefully chronicles the origins of his fascinations with disembodied voices, lenses and mirrors, the printed word, movies ("The Horrors of Film") and, to remind us of who put the "ero" in ero-guro, sex.

TOM MES

real-life dangers that come along with sharing a planet with millions of potentially unstable people.



Boyd E. Harris and R.J. Cavender open with an introductory story that bears a warning: every relative, neighbour and colleague is a lurking danger. This tale reads like a barrage of news statistics claiming nothing is safe, not even a trip to the airport. That is not to say there aren't supernatural elements in the pages of this book, but the monsters are lurking in the background here, using their human minions to lure their prey.

The stories are uniformly well crafted and original, but a few really stand out. Sunil Sadanand's "Them" is a microscopic nightmare about a man being invaded by brain parasites. The reader follows his thoughts and actions as they become increasingly disjointed and robotic from the deepening invasion. Michael Louis Calvillo's "Consumed" finds a man buried alive within a pit of corpses – his only possible means of escape is to eat his way out. The most intriguing stories in this book follow the thought progressions and internal monologues of their characters as they pass in and out of unusual and horrifying states of consciousness. As well, several tales explore particularly current-day concerns, including authoritarian torture and pedophilia.

Each story deserves a proper reading, but to consume this collection as a whole is like digesting a storm of insults against human nature. By compiling these works into a single volume, the editor presents humanity as something hopeless and lost. All of the characters – even the protagonists – are cowardly, selfish and desperately lacking redeeming qualities. As readers, we are looking to set ourselves apart from the monster, but here we are greeted by a twisted mirror image of ourselves. And that is true horror indeed.

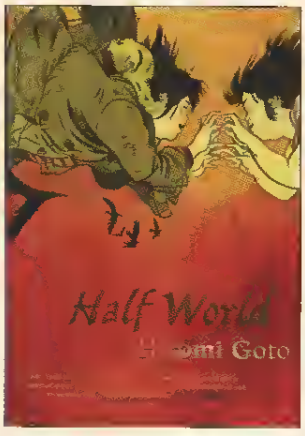
JESSA SOBCZUK

HALF WORLD

Hiromi Goto
Puffin Canada

Puffin's decision to put a Neil Gaiman quote on the cover of this book is both appropriate and unfortunate. Like Gaiman's *Coraline*, *Half World* is a coming-of-age dark fantasy about a young girl's trip to a netherworld, complete with family drama and a wide variety of richly imagined monsters. So while the quote undoubtedly positions the release accurately, the downside is that it sets up expectations that are too high.

Author Hiromi Goto was born in Japan, raised in Canada. Both cultures strongly influence her storytelling, and setting this in Vancouver (her current home) not only brings a perpetually rainy environment to the book but also a strong element of Chinese culture that mixes with the Japanese mythology. *Half World* is the story of Melanie Tamaki, a fourteen-year-old social outcast and the only child of a sickly, alcoholic mother. Melanie's mom goes missing one night and a strange phone call – from a disconnected phone – tells her to look behind a door in a highway tunnel. Once there, she crosses into another realm, Half World, where grotesque residents are trapped in the exact moment of the greatest trauma of their lives. Melanie eventually figures out that she has to confront Half World's most powerful and horrifying figure, Mr. Glueskin, in order to get her mother back. And, like countless other teenage protagonists currently filling the young adult racks at libraries, she discovers that she is the linchpin of an ancient prophecy and destined to return the realm to peace.



The weary, sarcastic tone of this review isn't just from a sense of déjà vu. The disgusting, twisted creatures that make up *Half World*, as well as the upside-down realm they inhabit, feel cribbed rather than original. The book even goes so far as to cite its sources, mentioning over and over again how Melanie's mother loves Hieronymus Bosch, and making specific reference to MC Escher and Frieda Kahlo's "What the Water Gave Me" as shorthand for describing what Half World is like. It feels like you're reading the footnotes. Combined with the uninspired plot and thin characters, *Half World* ultimately feels like only half an effort.

JASON LAPEYRE


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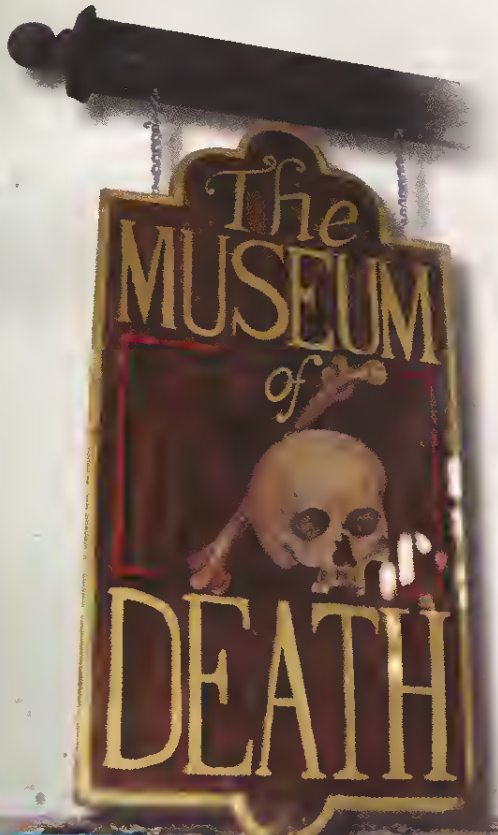


MUSEUM OF DEATH – HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA

BY RYAN TUREK

In a town built on the business of creating cinematic false realities, there is 2000 square-feet of raw, stark truth behind a gated, vine-covered facade: the aptly named Museum of Death. Located in a former recording studio on Hollywood Blvd. between the Vanguard nightclub and a medical clinic, it's the creation of owners J.D. Healy and Cathee Shultz. Driven by a fascination with the scope of death in all of its guises, the pair developed the museum from its origins in the early '90s as a mortuary-cum-art gallery in San Diego. (In the coming months the museum will return to its roots by opening an adjoining art gallery.) Their menagerie of the macabre is sourced from private collectors, donations and tenacious internet searches – they make it clear that everything is verified and nothing is stolen.

Upon entering the lobby, I'm advised to allot at least 45 minutes to get the full experience and am warned of the extreme subject matter contained within the collection. Those with strong stomachs who slap down the $15 admission fee press onward through the wrought-iron gate that leads into the museum proper.



You might say the tour officially begins with the end. A cracked, weathered casket greets visitors in a room too small to house much more than this item and two large, framed photographs, a laterally bisected human head (brain exposed) and a set of gnarled, decomposing hands, respectively.

The spacious adjoining room has a distinct odor – aged flowers mixed with a musty fragrance one might encounter rummaging through grandmother's attic. This area is dedicated to the funeral business; everything and anything related to the craft of embalming and preparing bodies for their final resting place is here. Cream-coloured walls are papered in matchbook covers and handheld fans from funeral homes around the country – promotional items to drum up business. Glass cases contain the tools of the trade: mortician's instruments including arterial tubes, forceps and trocars. If you want to know how to use them, there's a mortician's how-to video on loop that depicts an embalming.

Here you'll also find death certificates, post-mortem photos of infants, casket blueprints and newspaper ads, a corpse removal stretcher and a coroner's table (complete with a "catch bucket" beneath a small hole where the head is placed). Beside a wicker casket leans a "cooling board" from 1881 – a simple rectangular piece of wood upon which undertakers would present the dead.

A third of this room is sectioned off by a large curtain, beyond which one of the museum's prized items resides. Venture behind it if you dare to see the head of Henri Désiré Landru, the French serial killer known as the "Bluebeard of Paris," who was guillotined in Versailles in 1922. His mummified noggin now sits behind glass on an antique embalmer's headrest. Look closely. Yes, those are intact eyelashes. Landru's beef-jerkied cranium was donated by a Malibu doctor who had it stored in his garage until his wife discovered it while cleaning and made him get rid of it.

Pushing deeper into the museum,there's a small room filled with the bones of assorted animals, including the neck and skull of a giraffe (affectionately called "Jerry" by the staff). On the way, I pass collages of some hard-hitting images. To the left is a series of photographs depicting a cheating wife who, with help from her boyfriend, killed her husband and proceeded to document their disposal of the body by sawing off his head, penis and other appendages, then propping them up in crude poses. Later, the demented pair had the film developed at a local drugstore by an equally warped friend. They didn't anticipate another employee discovering the photos and calling the cops, however. Another series of pictures features the decapitated body of a prostitute butchered by Hollywood's "Sunset Slayer." Soul-scarring material to be sure.

If that's not morbid enough for you, take a slow jaunt down the rest of the hallway past the display of black and whites that chronicle vehicular deaths from the 1940s to today. If you're up for it, gaze upon mangled faces, crushed arms, a driver who had his head nearly knocked off his neck by a steering column, and a trucker who burned to death. Then there's the downright baffling picture of a body skewered to the top rung of a telephone pole with a car wrapped around the pole's base and two officials staring incredulously upward.

Yet another room spotlights Charles Manson and the Manson Family, their victims and other notorious murders. On an orange wall, "Helter Skelter" is scrawled in red paint. Included here are books, some of Manson's artwork, news clippings about the crimes, grisly photos from that tragic night in August 1969 and a television playing a documentary on the Manson trials. There are celebrity death profile sheets here too, including ones for Janis Joplin, Elvis, Dorothy Straffen, Chris Farley and Sam Kinison. Different eras are represented, and gruesome images of Elizabeth "Black Dahlia" Short's crime scene aren't placed far from a collection of paraphernalia related to the O.J. murder trial.

Venturing into another wing of the museum, one can peer through a window at a mock-up of a Heaven's Gate cult bedroom with a bunk bed, household items and mannequins dressed in jumpsuits. Most of the room's contents were purchased at auction in Texas following the group's mass suicide in '97. One of the suits, according to Shultz, was going to be tossed in the trash, but a friend who worked in an area morgue donated it. Inside one of the pockets was a suicide note, which is mounted here.

The "cult" theme is carried on with exhibits on the 1993 Branch Davidian siege and Jim Jones' Peoples Temple (look for his business card) before honing in on specific individuals, such as assisted suicide advocate Jack Kevorkian (reproductions of his paintings hang from the walls) and deceased Christian Death founder Rozz Williams (see a part of the door he hung himself from). To lighten the mood, there are also two Vincent Price games from the 1960s: *Hangman* (naturally) and *Shrunken Head Apple Sculpture*.

This paves the way for the museum's most primal section: war atrocities and acts of cannibalism. If you can stomach the WWII kamikaze attack aftermath and El Salvadorian Death Squad photos – including one with a victim's skull peeled clean of flesh – then continue on and peruse the shrunken heads, as well as profiles of renowned maniacs and carnivores, including Albert Fish, Ed Gein, Andrei Chikalito and Jeffrey Dahmer.

Further along there's a larger room with a Hollywood Babylon theme. Photos of deceased actors from the collection of filmmaker and author Kenneth Anger are here. Then, look behind you to see one of car crash victim Jayne Mansfield's stuffed Chihuahuas. (Church of Satan founder Anton LaVey had all four of the actress' dogs taxidermied after it was revealed in Mansfield's will that he was to be the beneficiary of the canines.)

For something even more animalistic, follow the death metal screams playing over the speakers to the "Theatre of Death." Here, visitors can kick up their feet in one of the many folding chairs and gaze at walls covered in newspaper pages sensationalizing disasters. A true "faces of death" documentary is playing out on a white screen, as well. The real-life video footage of dismembered corpses, executions and accidents has been known to make some visitors pass out.

My visit wraps with serial killers and executions. A one-sheet for the 1970 film *The Traveling Executioner* accompanies a real electric chair. Art from the likes of serial killers John Wayne Gacy and Richard Ramirez resembles children's drawings one might hang from a refrigerator door. A David Berkowitz letter tells you "How to kill a fat lady while enjoying yourself" – complete with miniature step-by-step drawings. Insane? You decide.

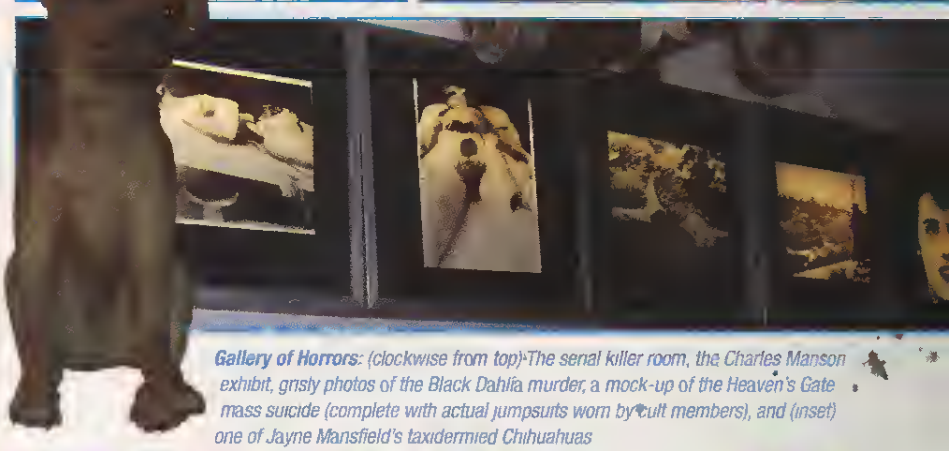
It goes without saying that The Museum of Death is not for the faint of heart. Healy and Shultz have created a destination that's aggressive, shocking and not without a tinge of oil-black humour. One thing is for sure, when you head for that exit door and an employee bids farewell with "Have a great life!" a chill will run down your spine.

For more information, visit myspace.com/museumofdeath or call 323-466-8011 for hours of operation.



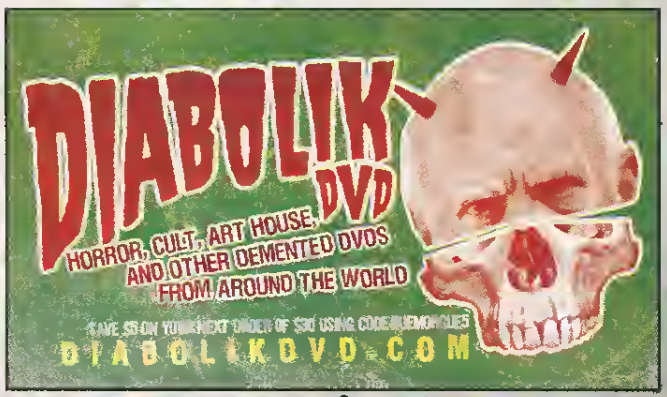






Gallery of Horrors: *(clockwise from top) The serial killer room, the Charles Manson exhibit, grisly photos of the Black Dahlia murder, a mock-up of the Heaven's Gate mass suicide (complete with actual jumpsuits worn by cult members), and (inset) one of Jayne Mansfield's taxidermied Chihuahuas*







THE GORE-MET

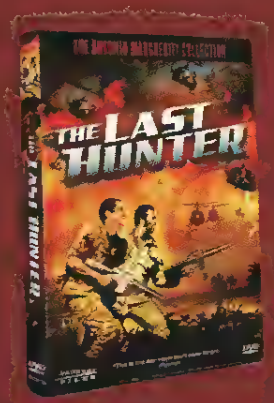
THE GORE-MET MAKES MUCH OF MARGHERITI



Antonio Margheriti is one of the woefully overlooked directors of the golden age of Italian exploitation cinema. Much of this is due to the wide variety of genres he worked in, and that he never directed a film that has come to be regarded as a masterpiece. Of the roughly 60 movies he made, only a handful have been restored for DVD, which is a shame considering that the ones available prove he's a craftsman who could deliver a solid film on a meagre budget.

Margheriti, who adopted the anglicized pseudonym Anthony M. Dawson, began his career in 1960, making low-budget science fiction and peplum films before turning to gothic horror. *Castle of Blood* (a.k.a. *Danza macabre*, 1963 – available from Synapse) stars genre icon Barbara Steele and is widely regarded as one of Margheriti's best films.

His second horror outing, 1963's *Virgin of Nuremburg* (available from Shriek Show), features Christopher Lee in a particularly menacing role and is notable for an early gore gag in which a rat eats a woman's nose. Margheriti made another film with Steele, *The Long Hair of Death* (1964, see p.42), before returning to sci-fi. His final gothic horror was *Web of the Spider* (1971), a colour remake of *Castle of Blood*. (Both titles are available on "public domain" discs).



Virtually every Italian horror director had a go at the hugely popular giallo genre, and Margheriti was no exception, making two decidedly offbeat gialli. *Schoolgirl Killer* (a.k.a. *Naked You Die*, 1967 – on DVD from Oark Sky) is a traditional but rather dry black-gloved thriller with strong comedic elements sure to put off most fans of the genre. *Seven Deaths in the Cat's Eye* (available from Blue Underground), made in 1973, is weirder but much more satisfying, combining Margheriti's gothic stylings with bloody straight-razor play. And a gorilla!

On a even gorier note, the extent of Margheriti's involvement in the production of the notorious splatter comedies *Flesh for Frankenstein* (1973) and *Blood for Dracula* (1974) – both available from Image – has been a subject of controversy among lovers of Italian horror cinema. Given the gothic style of these films, fans have speculated as to just how much of them are the work of accredited director Paul Morrissey, and how much is that of Margheriti, who is listed as a second unit director on Italian prints for "quota reasons." In an interview in Luca M. Palmerini and Gaetano Mistretta's excellent book *Spaghetti Nightmares*, Margheriti stated, "I supervised both, and for *Flesh for Frankenstein* I had to shoot various supplementary scenes in order to bring the film up to standard length." Hmm...

In 1980 Margheriti made two movies that will be of interest to regular readers of this space. The first was the Vietnam-era pseudo-zombie action/horror hybrid *Cannibal Apocalypse* (another Image release), starring John Saxon and John Morghen as Vietnam vets who come home with a taste for human flesh. This splatterfic video nasty features one of the more spectacular on-screen demises of Italian cinema whipping boy Morghen, via a seriously grisly shotgun torso ventilation.

In the aforementioned interview, Margheriti stated that he didn't intend to make a splatter film at all, but that the producers demanded it. Saxon told me in an interview in 2000 that he regretted making this film, and that he was so appalled by the violence and the sexual subplot with a teenaged girl that he seriously considered quitting the production.

Margheriti stuck with the war gore theme for his next effort, *The Last Hunter* (Oark Sky again), a straight-up bloody 'namsploitation flick inspired in no small part by *The Deer Hunter* (1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) – which he shot in the Philippines, utilizing sets from the latter production. David Warbeck stars as an officer sent on a secret mission deep into Viet Cong territory to shut down a radio station broadcasting anti-American propaganda. This one includes bloody firefights, righteously rotted corpses, a *punji* stick disembowelling and a prisoner with half his face eaten off by rats!

Margheriti more or less signed off on the horrific with these two films, switching to action and fantasy films until the bottom fell out of the Italian film industry at the end of the '80s. He passed away in 2002, an unsung horror hero with a knack for the crimson.

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REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, KEITH CARMAN, MARK R. HASAN, AARON VON LUPTON AND GARY PULLIN



TWISTED NERVE/ THE BRIDE WORE BLACK

SOUNDTRACK

Bernard Herrmann

KRITZERLAND

It's ironic that one of Bernard Herrmann's most critically derided themes – the addictive whistling tune from *Twisted Nerve* – became a minor sensation when it popped up in *Kill Bill Vol. 1*. Now, that original *Twisted Nerve* score is finally available on a crisp-sounding CD, albeit as a limited disc sporting the same brief contents that previously appeared on the A-side of a rare European LP. Even if one loathes that whistling "Main Title" (not to mention its bizarre pop arrangement), the main variations are exactly what Herrmann fans have come to expect: lilting harmonics, sombre strings and beautiful woodwinds that recall the composer's gorgeous work on *The Night Digger* (1971). A more plaintive use of harmony, whimsy and orchestral dynamics is present in the four bonus extracts from *The Bride Wore Black*. The lofty woodwinds in "Cookie" and a tragic waltz for murderess Julie are contrasted by Herrmann's almost grotesque use of the "Wedding March" for her flashback. It's satisfying to have two of Herrmann's rarest albums on a cleanly mastered CD, but the lack of complete scores continues to be a major gripe. MRH ★★★★



THE UNBORN

SOUNDTRACK

Ramin Djawadi

LAKESHORE RECORDS

Ramin Djawadi's score for *The Unborn* doesn't exactly, well, rock the cradle. It's based around a rock-styled lullaby that's not particularly memorable, but the composer does make good use of this theme when it's distilled into ethereal tracks such as "Mom's Room," with soft notes (some played backwards) drifting through atonal strands and clouds of misty synth chords. A fair number of cues are written to exploit teasing, gloomy, atmospheric visuals. Yet the score's major downside is its lack of a strong narrative drive. Things shimmer and shrill and there's plenty of synthetic dissonance, but the reliance on sampled sounds and heavy digital processing make the album very sterile, if not generic. Later use of strings in cues, including "Book of Mirrors," recall Hans Zimmer's music for *The Ring*, but there's no mordant wit or sense of genuine dread at work here to keep *The Unborn* from being stillborn. MRH ★★



THE UNINVITED

SOUNDTRACK

Christopher Young

LAKESHORE RECORDS

It's expected that when Christopher Young (*The Grudge*) scores a ghost story involving a little girl, the title track will be based around a sing-song melody, pretty child vocals and lilting harmonics. But once that perfunctory exercise is over, you know everything that follows will be affected by the composer's ongoing fascination with 20th-century orchestral writing. Wordless chorals are integral to *The Uninvited*, and "Cry of Love" is a perfect example of human voices morphing between metallic and pulsing string sounds, then halting for a sudden burst of pseudo-Asian chatter and throat noises. Fans of Young's non-film work know the composer's heart lies in experimenting with all manner of sounds and idioms, and while he has occasionally revisited old ideas for lesser films, *The Uninvited* is a regal score with cleverly veiled ferocity. MRH ★★★★



TWILIGHT

SOUNDTRACK

Carter Burwell

ATLANTIC

Carter Burwell's return to the world of troubled teens is awfully similar to his work on *Fear* (1996), and while that score contained a more significant dose of thunderous (and deliciously robust) percussion, the vampire mythos in *Twilight* has inspired Burwell to think medieval rockabilly – which surprisingly works quite well. The score's strongest material comes from a lovely romantic theme that's often performed using intimate combinations of woodwinds, piano, guitar and strings. Those airy cues are contrasted by more familiar electronic textures and close-miked percussion, while a wailing guitar highlights bouts of raging hormones and the violent hunger for blood. While Burwell's cyclical three-note tension motif does get awfully repetitive when it drifts through too many tracks, the colours he creates in simple duets and ensembles give the score a potent emotional undercurrent. MRH ★★★



SONO MORTI

COUNTRY

S/T

O SUM

An album cover featuring a noose hanging from a dead tree and a crow perched on a gravestone, influences ranging from Cash to Morricone to Danzig, and that great band name – Sono Morti's heart is undoubtedly buried in the right place. This side project by two members of the Cincinnati horror punk outfit Vladimirs and a guy named Crank incorporates trumpet, organ, acoustic Spanish

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MY BLOODY VALENTINE (2009)

SOUNDTRACK

Michael Wandmacher

LAKESHORE RECORDS



Maybe it was the retro 3-D element that inspired Michael Wandmacher, because *My Bloody Valentine* is a robust, old-style horror score. It features grand moments of snarling orchestral showmanship (that include plenty of dissonance, clamour and percussive stabs), married with the composer's own electronic sounds. It's also a tremendously fun score because it has the broad scope fans expect from a high-profile slasher (there's zero ambiguity about what kind of carnage is being meted out in cues such as "Dental Work") and Wandmacher's short, memorable theme "Prodigal Son" conveys the lead character's troubled persona with precision. The transitions between the electronic, orchestral and techno elements are flawless, and the album's engineering is superb. More significant, though, are the short moments of contemplation and sadness that make *My Bloody Valentine* a brutal horror score with, uh, some heart. MRH ★★★½

THE INDEPENDENTS

PUNK

Do It Again

SUKI



Joey Ramone's favourite punk band crawls back out of South Carolina's swampland with *Do It Again*, a short-but-sweet rot 'n' roll record aimed straight at your horror-lovin' heart. The demonic duo of Evil Presly and Willy B. (backed by a revolving door of players) has been seamlessly stitching together punk, '50s rockabilly and ska with heavy doses of horror and exploitation for well over a decade now. And while most horror punk vocalists try to pertect their Danzig imitation, Presly's dynamic voice falls somewhere between a demented Elvis and a psychotic Sinatra. Both "Black Dream," an uptempo love song about curling up with your girlfriend on a rainy day to watch Vincent Price flicks (naturally), and the title track are perfect picks for a zombie sock hop. Throw in a creepy cool cover of The Coasters' "Poison Ivy" and the hilariously riotous rock song "Dolemite" and you'll be nodding your melon taster than a Rudy Ray Moore bobblehead. **GP** ☠☠☠½

strings and the atmosphere of a Sergio Leone western gone gothic for what should be a killer country-horror hybrid debut. No wonder it's so goddamn frustrating then that the band can't pull it off. "Black Robed Witness," "Eye for an Eye" and, especially, "Crimson Rider" could be classics if the vocals were strong enough to nail that Danzig-esque howl 'n' drawl and the production was better. As is, this sounds like a demo. Hombres, I implore you to add a singer who can sling those dark notes and a recording engineer that can kick the mud out of your spurs. Don't let Sono Morti swing in the wind. **DA** ☠☠



DEAD SEA SURFERS

GOTH

S/T

DEAD PHISH

This small-time goth rock band from Tennessee doesn't even try to hide its influences; the '80s sounds of Sisters of Mercy, The Cult and Joy Division are all openly worn on the members' black fishnet sleeves. Make no mistake though, the band provides nothing more than a superficial imitation of that classic sound, and the ultra-basic songwriting simply cannot sustain the four- to five-minute tracks. Admittedly, the post-punk-with-a-keyboard template does result in a couple of catchy numbers, particularly "Walking Away" and "Alone Again," but they're only fun in a novelty kind of way. And for some inexplicable reason, the album occasionally breaks into a hard rock sound that the band is painfully ill-equipped to pull off; it also does little to dispel the myth that all goth kids are wimps. **AVL** ☠



BLDDD

INDUSTRIAL

Lost Sky

DARKEST LABYRINTH

After seven years on the Japanese indie goth circuit and three different artistic concepts (including one about vampires and another about Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs Du Mal* poetry collection), Blood is calling it quits, going out with *Lost Sky*. Unfortunately it's not much of a farewell gift. Essentially a dance album, *Lost Sky* is all about techno beats and nightclub synth, while heavy metal guitar chugs away in the back of the mix. The track "Nothing" adds a slightly darker edge with its quick pace and swirling effects, but overall the album reminds us too much of the generic background music that you were too drunk to pay attention to during university orientation week. Worse, it includes a total of seven remixes of the title track, all of which are significantly more annoying than the original. Pass. **AVL** DOA



SPECTRUM-X

INDUSTRIAL

Tea Party With Zombies

DARKEST LABYRINTH

A re-release of Spectrum-X's full-length debut, *Tea Party With Zombies* features new keyboard and guitar parts, as well as detailed full-colour packaging to go along with the thirteen fairy tales of terror penned by this Italian psycho-industrial duo. Essentially a mash-up of Marilyn Manson and KMFDM with extreme metal tendencies, Spectrum-X adds a dash of insanity to the mix through the use of childlike keyboard sounds, which bring an extra level of creep to songs about Lizzy Borden, *Texas Chainsaw* and other gory delights. Still, it's not really that strong an effort. *Tea Party* could potentially function fine as a straight industrial-thrash album, but too often it gets pushed into annoying territory by CandyBones' grating vocals and an imposing techno vibe. The songs also often end abruptly, indicating that they may not have been that well thought through. Worth a gamble for fans of completely bizarre music, but the typical goth, industrial and metal set should probably stay well clear. **AVL** ☠½



TRIBULATION

METAL

The Horror

PULVERIZED

The Horror is an apt title for this debut effort by Swedish death metal outfit Tribulation. The album (mostly) ignores the expected satanic ramblings in favour of a more general "horror" theme, complete with ghoulish artwork. Songs such as "Beyond the Horror," "Vampyre" and "Seduced by the Smell of Rotten Flesh" end in dark atmospherics before exploding into the next track's storm of thrash riffs and blast beats. Tribulation will please underground death and thrash enthusiasts with an intense, violent sound that still manages to be brutally technical and listenable – even if none of the songs actually stand out from one another. Also, check out Tribulation's website (tribulation.se) for a preview of the band's art projects, which appear to combine gothic horror and black metal. All in all, *The Horror* is a solid slab of extreme metal brutality, though a more fleshed-out concept would have made it more compelling. **AVL** ☠☠☠½



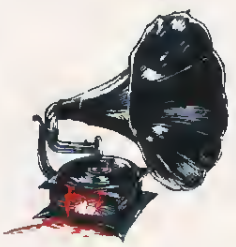
MANTIC RITUAL

METAL

Executioner

NUCLEAR BLAST

Easily the best straightforward thrash metal album I've heard in a decade, Mantic Ritual's debut *Executioner* could be viewed as the culmination of the genre's most primordial elements honed into a sharp blast of rage. It features the cut-to-the-chase style of Municipal Waste without the juvenile lyrics, a barbaric aggression akin to formative D.R.I., the modest technicality of Nuclear Assault and *Kill 'Em All*'s punk rawness. Tracks such as "Murdered to Death," "Double the Blood" and "By the Cemetery" ring out with passion, unbridled energy and an impressive mix of sinister humour and malicious intent. *Executioner* is a supreme foreboding work that delivers an onslaught without overindulging in showy musicianship. **KC** ☠☠☠☠☠



TOBONTO'S LEGENDARY ELECTRIC VIOLIN-WIELDING MONSTER **NASH THE SLASH** UNLEASHES A NEW RECORD ALONG WITH *THE NOT-SO-SILENT FILM COLLECTION*, THE BEST SUBSTITUTE FOR HIS NOT-SO-SILENT LIVE SHOW.

FIEND WITHOUT A FACE

BY JOHN W. BOWEN



From cramped night clubs to concert halls, Nash the Slash cuts a spectral figure, a mash-up of Universal's bandaged, bespectacled Invisible Man, an evil circus ringmaster and a post-apocalyptic pimp, performing in front of a projection screen and eerily lit from below. A huge silent film lover, his curious name is taken from a killer butler in the 1927 Laurel and Hardy film *Do Detectives Think?* Since 1975, he's been a one-man band whose principal instruments are heavily processed electric mandolin and violin over densely layered keyboards, loops and drum machines. While much of his recorded output consists of dark, atmospheric electronica, he also has a serious classic rock fetish, and has played in the pop electronic group FM, toured with the likes of Gary Numan, Iggy Pop and The Tubes, not to mention, he's recorded more famous covers than Dr. Johnny Fever could shake a bong at.

"My background is classical and rock; my influences mainly come from Beethoven, The Who and Krautrock," Nash tells *Rue Morgue*. "*The London Times* once called my music 'punk classical.' I love that description. But I am also the godfather of industrial noise. As proof of this, I suggest people listen to 'Reactor No. 2' [from the 1978 record *Children of the Night*] as well as 'Danger Zone.' Skinny Puppy used to sneak into my shows when I would play in Vancouver. They were just kids."

But Nash's eclecticism doesn't end there – during the latter part of his three-decade-plus career, he has composed his own scores for a handful of classic silent horror films, including *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), F.W. Mumau's original *Nosferatu* (1922), *The Lost World* (1925) and the Luis Buñuel/Salvador Dali experimental short *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). He frequently performs as live accompaniment to screenings of these films in clubs and cinemas and occasionally at horror conventions. Legendary as his live theatrics may be, the trademark mummified bandages have more ties to the 1970s than any Universal horrors.

"The Invisible Man getup is actually a secondary reference," he explains. "I originally performed in tails and top hat with dark glasses and no bandages. I would do 'theme performances' live, and in 1978, there was a near-meltdown of the nuclear reactor at Three-Mile Island in New York. Then I did a show called Neighbourhood Alert at [nightclub] The Edge in Toronto, where I appeared on stage with my head wrapped in bandages, which had been treated with phosphores-

cent makeup, so when the stage lights went out, my head glowed in the dark, as if I was a nuke victim. The bandages have stuck to my face ever since."

Much of his incentive to compose his own silent film scores stems from his general dissatisfaction with lacklustre music on DVD releases of well-loved classics, much of which, he says, is inappropriately cut-and-pasted from classical music.

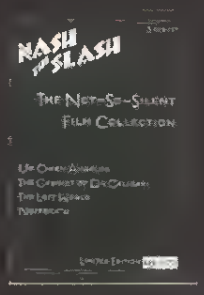
"I'm a huge fan of silent horror films, and the music [on the DVD reissues] is terrible, pointless," he laments of a recent German edition of *Nosferatu* with an original modern music score. "Why not get a composer to write something appropriate? The music was some boring goth band, but the audacity was that the music just went from one track to another, like the producer just pushed 'Play' – no attempt at atmosphere."

While there's no true substitute for his live events, fans can now take home the Nash silent movie experience with his new limited edition three-DVD set *The Not-So-Silent Film Collection*, which includes new versions of *Caligari*, *Nosferatu*, *The Lost World* and *Un Chien Andalou*. The inclusion of his sublimely twisted score for *Chien Andalou* is especially significant, since Nash made his first appearance as a silent film accompanist, providing the soundtrack for this film in front of a full house at Toronto's late Uptown Theatre back in 1975 as the opening act for a midnight screening of the Rolling Stones film *Gimme Shelter*. Whatever jitters he may have experienced at the time have long been offset by fond memories of the crowd's enthusiasm ("Everybody was stoned out of their minds – a good time was had!")



Aside from some new music added to the film's middle section, his *Chien* score remains largely unchanged today.

"It was many years after *Un Chien* that I began work on the other three films," he says. "I composed *Caligari* in 1996, *The Lost World* in 1997 and *Nosferatu* in 2000. All the films have been performed live, in small clubs, cinemas and at sci-fi/horror conventions. One convention had me perform *The Lost World* as a tribute to Ray Harryhausen. He was too ill to attend, but I sent him a copy of my version of the film and he sent me a nice thank you letter."



Although his *Nosferatu* soundtrack includes excerpts from classical works such as Gabriel Fauré's "Requiem" and Camille Saint-Saëns' "Danse Macabre," he drew much of the inspiration for his original soundtrack from Eastern Orthodox church music, which he describes as "really haunting and creepy."

Nash, of course, acknowledges the possibility of legal complications over performance rights, but isn't losing sleep over it.

"I dare these guys to come out of the woodwork!" he laughs, "I'd try to pitch them a deal on my own music and tell them: your soundtrack sucks! Mine's better!"

The musician has no immediate plans to score any more silents, although certain titles seem to cry out for the treatment. The iconic 1925 *Phantom of the Opera* with Lon Chaney might seem an obvious choice, but, as he says, "Everyone's done it. It's simply too long, plus I'd have to write an opera for the middle section." He also cites length as his reason for avoiding another Chaney favourite, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923).

When pressed about his own favourite horror films, Nash is adamant: "I'm a classics kinda guy." Yet his definition of "classic" isn't confined to early works. Not surprisingly, music scores are often a determining factor in his tastes.

"My favourites are the ones with killer music: *Psycho* with music by Bernard Herrmann and *Jaws* with John Williams' best score ever. *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* has the creepiest opening sound of any horror film. I love the early splatter films like *I Spit on Your Grave*, but today's horror films bore me to death. Do we really want to see Saw *VIII*?"

The new DVD set coincides with another Nash release: the CD *In-A-Gadda-Da-Nash*, a collection of classic rock covers, which includes songs made famous by The Who, Gordon Lightfoot, The Scorpions, They Might Be Giants and, of course, Iron Butterfly. But don't look for live Nash performances in North America any time soon, as he's currently locked away in his studio working on music for the second season of TV's *Cold Blood* (his curent day job), and doesn't plan to emerge until September for a UK tour. *Cold Blood*'s producers were fans of his previous work, and he credits his success with the show to skills he honed working on film soundtracks.

"The work I had done on these films helped me to create the music for the TV show, because the writing for both projects needs to be short thematic pieces with melodrama, tension and cohesion. I would love to create music for a contemporary horror film. I have done the score for Bruce McDonald's *Roadkill* and *Highway 61*. I also did the music for *Blood & Donuts*, a very strange little horror-comedy. It was great fun."



"THE LONDON TIMES ONCE CALLED MY MUSIC 'PUNK CLASSICAL.' I LOVE THAT DESCRIPTION."
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GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE
HIGHEST RATING IS THREE



RESIDENT EVIL 5

PS3, Xbox 360
Capcom

It's been four years since *Resident Evil* fans have had a new infection to fight. This time around gamers are sent to a fictitious African country to investigate a parasitic outbreak that has mutated the local population into bloodthirsty maniacs called *majini*. Playing as Chris Redfield, a character from the very first *RE* game, you're teamed up with a bioterronsm agent named Sheva, who in single-player mode is confrolled by the game's impressive AI system (she follows you to provide cover fire, ammunition and health boosts).

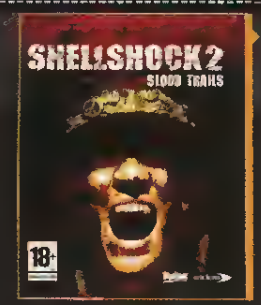
Together you must fight through the decrepit streets of a bustling shantytown, run from a rabble of infected villagers deep within the tunnels of an abandoned mine and boat down a twisting, mist-shrouded river where a vast and horrible abomination lurks beneath the water, waiting to snatch you.

Capcom has really gone the extra mile this time, delivering photo-realistic environments and a foreboding orchestral soundtrack driven by effectively haunting vocals. The battles are thoroughly nerve-wracking and enemies include a gang of undead bikers armed with chains and Molotov cocktails, a hulking executioner who wields a giant axe wrapped in spikes and a spider/crab hybrid that's as hideous as it is ferocious.

Whether you choose to go it alone or team up in co-op mode (in which a friend takes on the role of Sheva), this is a thrilling game with loads of replay value that has earned its place as the crown jewel of the *RE* franchise.







SHELLSHOCK 2: BLOOD TRAILS

PC, PS3, Xbox 360
Eidos Interactive

Blood Trails looks like just another war game but the developers added something special: zombies! And I love the smell of zombies in the morning.

Set in the middle of the Vietnam War, players are placed in the shoes of a soldier sent into the Cambodian jungle to recover a highly infectious experimental drug that turns people into the walking dead. But that goal soon vanishes as players simply battle through ten levels of enemy soldiers and hordes of deadites, using everything from a machete to a machine gun.

Though the game successfully blends detailed environments (misty rainforests, claustrophobic underground tunnels) with some good gore and the chilling sound effects of soldiers screaming and babies crying, it suffers from a virtually non-existent soundtrack and a terrible AI system. Enemies are dull and predictable, as they always emerge from fixed spawning locations. With a mere five-hour play-through time, you'd be better off re-enlisting with *Halo 3* or *Killzone 2* instead.



MADWORLD

Wii
Sega

If you've ever wanted to spank a vampire or use a zombie's decapitated head as a golf ball, this goofy but extremely gory game is for you.

Enter the striking black and white environment (that at times resembles *Sin City*) of *Madworld* as Jack, an ex-soldier with a chainsaw for an arm who is a contestant on an ultra-violent death match television game show. Appropriately, the only other colour to appear in *Madworld* is red… as in buckets and buckets of blood! And you'll be seeing lots of that, as the only way to level up is by inflicting as much hurt as possible on aliens, werewolves, zombies and other baddies. Tear into them with spears, spikes, signposts, swords and whatever else you can find.

Bonus: complete wacky mini-challenges, such as shooting opponents into the air with a cannon, to create bloody fireworks displays. Buy it before it's banned!

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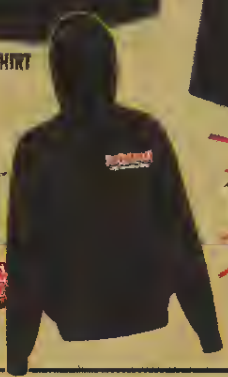




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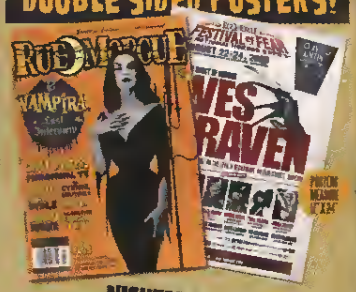
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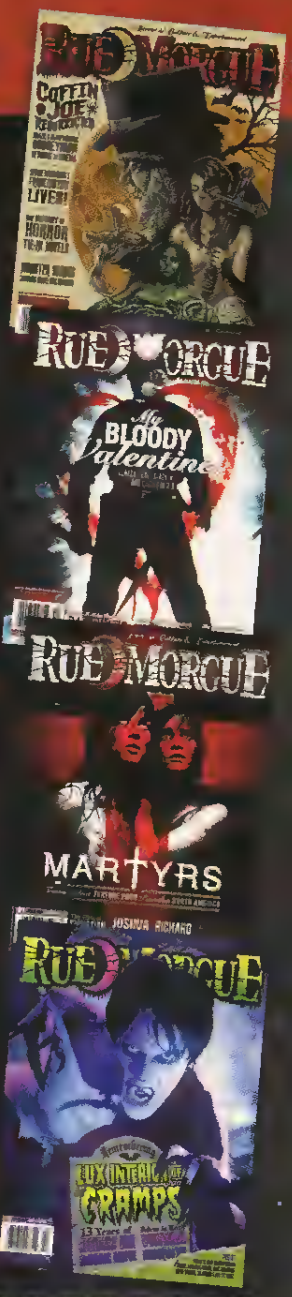
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